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Where the Loon Calls

A COMPLETE NOVEL—THE BELLE OF THE MARSHLANDS ON
LAKE ERIE'S AMERICAN SIDE AND A MARAUDING
SAILORMAN FROM CANADA MEET IN A
GRIPPING ROMANCE

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THE last days of red-hued fall had come to the vast marshlands between the mouth of the River Raisin and Maumee Bay. Inland, the ground swelled away alluringly to rolling gray-blue plains and glowing timbered hills.

And yet it was the dark-green, wind-bent cedars, fringing the sands of Bay Pointe, which caught and held the eye—these and the sullen, white-capped waters of Lake Erie. They alone were vibrant with life.

Fall, here, was sad—as it must be wherever winter comes to strangle life with its icy fingers. Yet, in midday, quail still called from the stubble, and red-winged blackbirds sailed over the marshes. Where the lake bit into the land to make La Plaisance Bay, jeweled waves broke idly upon the white beach.

A girl came to the door of the long, low cabin set well back from the beach in the little clump of cedars, which marked the spot where Otter Creek joined the bay. Although hatless, she was warmly dressed, and if the cold wind made her wince, it was because it reached the spirit of her rather than the flesh.

Her dark-brown eyes narrowed pensively as she gazed across the water toward the distant tip of Bay Pointe. Turning her head slowly, she glanced toward the north where lay Monroe—or Frenchtown, as her grandfather still called it.

She had been to Monroe twice. As the crow flies, it was only eight miles; by water it was nearer twelve—a long beat to the mouth of the Raisin, and a back-breaking two miles of rowing up the river itself. And yet, in that land of few roads,

men traveled by water whenever possible; in winter they went over the ice.

Monroe was only a village, but it was old, French, Catholic, and wholly to be desired by Toinette Chevalier, this girl in the doorway of the cabin. She would have asked for nothing better than to end her days there.

A convent was in Monroe, and Sidonie Morrin had taken the veil there. Often, when Toinette's imagination ran riot, she pictured herself following in Sidonie's footsteps; and if she were alone in the cabin at the time, she would walk in imitation of the nuns, her eyes cast down, and a sad, sweet smile on her lips.

Toinette was not yet twenty, but for five years she had done the work of a man. The few clothes she had, she made herself. The girls of her acquaintance did likewise; and, like her, they went barefoot from May until October, save on such days as took them to church or mill at Vienna or the more distant Monroe.

Their footprints were flat and broad in the dust or mud, all except those of Toinette, which were narrow, and faint under the arches. It was as if an aristocratic child had walked there shoeless, in sport.

Other girls along the bay—Josephine Duval, for instance—had felt the urge for something better than the peasantlike existence to which they had been born. She had gone to Toledo to work in a factory, and had come back once or twice with her city ways and fine clothes.

Josephine's parents still lived in their cabin on Woodchuck Creek. She sent them money occasionally, but no one mentioned her name any more; and the young girls and boys surmised why.

But Toinette Chevalier was untroubled by any thought of Josephine Duval's fate as she stood gazing off across the water, the wind whipping her clothes and revealing her slender ankles and gently swelling but sturdy limbs and strong, deep-bosomed body. She had seen other winters close in, but never before had the dying fall filled her with a feeling of isolation and loneliness. It seemed now that a hostile hand was at her throat.

She found it impossible to reconcile herself to the long months of snow and ice which were coming. This mood had been growing on her for several days, and it had stilled her song.

Her grandfather had not been sober in

months, but he had openly remarked the change in her. Strangely embarrassed, she had turned away from him, wondering what he read in her eyes that made him so angry.

The northeaster, which was setting in, would blow for three days or more, piling up the water from North Cape all the way to Stony Point. In her mind's eye, Toinette could see the flood creeping over the fields and roads, until Petee's Marsh and Plum Creek Bay and all the lowland between the cabin and the Raisin were a vast weed-clogged sea.

Toinette recalled a memorable fall when Flygette La Plante had awakened in the middle of the night to find his shanty afloat. He had put his mother-in-law, and Agathe, his wife, and all the little La Plantes, into the big, flat-bottomed boat that he used for lifting his nets, and had followed the shanty across country. It had come to rest, finally, upon the bank of Otter Creek, a mile and a half from where it formerly stood.

That had been three years ago. The shanty was still there. Agathe claimed that she liked it better than on the bay. The road to Vienna passed near by, and enabled her to keep in touch with her many relatives.

Flygette was a very profane man, and the manner in which he had quitted the bay provided a subject which, even now, stirred him to the depths of his vocabulary. His enforced removal made him the butt of many a rude jest.

Toinette had laughed with the others, but to-day she did not find Flygette's plight amusing. It typified the unceasing fight which all of them waged against the elements. She had often waded knee-deep through ice-cold water to feed her chickens, or Honorine, the old mare.

It dawned on her suddenly that she was not thinking of Monroe, save as it signified the outside world. There also was Toledo. The portentous red glow, which stained the distant heavens whenever fire claimed a grain elevator or factory, had instilled in her a fear of the distant city.

Business men from Toledo sometimes came to the bay to shoot ducks and snipe. They were well-dressed, prosperous persons, who were as strange to her as she was to them.

Her grandfather welcomed them, but she could not forget that they had made it

impossible for her people to hunt or fish on Bay Pointe Marsh. Isadore Couzeno had dared them to stop him, and one of the club's watchmen had shot him.

But Monroe? Surely if the storms of winter were to keep one from going there, they would keep one from coming from Canada, which was much farther away. Toinette sighed at the thought; too many strange men came from Canada to see her grandfather.

She scanned the billowy lake. It was almost as if she expected to catch sight of the swaggering, boisterous fellows who so often slipped into La Plaisance Bay after nightfall—and sailed away before dawn.

They were a wild, fearless set, huge of body and deep-voiced. When they sang, they drowned the sound of the booming surf; when they danced, the cabin shook. If the girls from the bay were not present, they paired off among themselves—promenading and swinging their grinning partners with the abandon of clumsy giants.

Toinette's thoughts were concerned with only one, Placide Labadee—Captain Labadee, her grandfather called him. Although she had long been closing her eyes to the truth, as girls of her age often do, it came as a revelation to her that she was thinking of a certain man.

Her boldness startled her; her red lips parted in a tremulous smile. She threw back her head and laughed; it was a soft, mocking note.

One night, now more than a month gone, Captain Labadee's arm had been about her waist. Placide—

She visualized him again, felt the strength of the great arm that had held her so easily, and trembled at memory of the devils that danced in his eyes!

He had said he would come again before the ice covered the lake. She liked to think that it was because of her that he intended to cross so late in the year.

Labadee had told her of the gay parties on the Canadian side, of the dances and the week-long festivities which ushered in the New Year. She caught herself hoping that Placide might not be too happy there.

Between the girls of Canada and herself there had always been the bond of race and language; but now she wondered what the young women of Rondeau were like. She had asked Placide, but he had dismissed the question with a depreciatory wave of his hand.

She knew that if he only guessed her loneliness, neither storm nor ice would stop him. Nightly, for more than a week past, she had prayed that he would come—just to hear his voice again would be happiness enough to last her all winter long.

From inside the cabin her grandfather's voice railed gruffly at Loup, the dog, ordering him out of his way. Toinette glanced fearfully at the door as she heard her grandfather approaching it with his shuffling steps.

How angry he would be if he suspected that her thoughts were of Captain Labadee! Many times had he warned her that she must never raise her eyes to the men who came to see him.

Once he had admonished her with the flat of his hand. What would he say were he to know that she had offered her lips to Placide?

But was she to remain a child forever? Did he still believe her ignorant of the mysterious business that brought Labadee and the others to the cabin?

Every one, from the bay to Vienna, knew what brought them there! Even good Father Braire smacked his lips over liquor that never knew the virtue of a revenue stamp. And the woollens they wore on Sundays—

Toinette wondered why they whispered about it. To her it was an honest business.

Toinette did not wait for her grandfather to open the door, but started for the barn, fearing that he might read in her eyes the forbidden longing that consumed her.

Grandfather Chevalier was a tyrant. When mellow with liquor he was jovial, but even then he rarely offered her any sign of affection.

Old Chevalier had bluntly intimated that he would slay any of his visitors rash enough to offer his granddaughter an indignity. She fancied that Placide Labadee had thought of that threat as he held her in his arms.

Beneath Chevalier's roof revelry often ran unchecked for days, ending sometimes in a knife thrust. It was a strange environment for a young girl, but Toinette accepted it without question. Since childhood she had heard the blasphemies of drink-loosened tongues, and it followed that she seldom noticed them now.

The girl never complained about her

grandfather's visitors. Without the carousing crew that gathered about him, her life would have been hopelessly drab.

Toinette realized that Grandfather Chevalier demanded a social distinction between these ribald men and herself. She sometimes wondered if the fear that some one might steal her away from him had aught to do with it. She knew that he hoped to marry her off to Cleophas Recor, the son of the blacksmith, or Xavier Drouillard, whose father ran the general store at Vienna.

Cleophas was nobody's fool; but Xavier! Toinette's teeth clicked angrily at thought of him.

Young Drouillard had been studying medicine at Monroe for two years, now. She always rebelled at the mental picture of herself married to him. Coming now, it infuriated her.

Arriving at the barn, she flung the heavy door back so sharply that it rocked on its hinges. Turning, she saw that her grandfather had come out, and that he was sweeping the lake with an old-fashioned glass.

Grandfather Chevalier was a squat, unkempt figure as he stood there hunched over into the wind, his round, ruddy face well buried in a half circle of bushy gray whiskers. Shaggy eyebrows curtained his shrewd, squinting eyes. He was old, but there was strength in his broad body. His long arms and huge hands were those of the *voyageur* of a forgotten day.

Toinette was some distance away, but she heard him grunt as he caught sight of that for which he searched. She was suddenly aware of the tumultuous beating of her heart.

Chevalier brought his glass down, and shouted to the girl:

"The Héloïse—Captain Labadee—is standing outside!"

This was always his best moment—when he announced the coming of the schooners which sailed up out of nowhere. And every time Toinette had been thrilled.

Grandfather Chevalier became at once a commanding figure. Into his voice crept the flavor of the sea. He was now erect, and impatient of the girl's inaction.

Toinette could only stare. *Placide was coming!*

Her cheeks burned. Unconsciously, her fingers sought the strands of black hair which the wind had loosened.

"Toinette!" the old man roared. "Hurry! Don't stand there gaping at me; you've got to be back from Vienna before night. Hitch up Honorine, and go! Tell Amador to bring his fiddle. We'll dance to-night! Ha! Ha!" His laugh was like a cannonade. "Maybe the Vallequette boys will come—and Julie and Delphine. Tell all of them! When you are ready, come to the house; I'll have some money for you."

He waited to see her pull down Honorine's harness before he turned back to the cabin.

Toinette hid her face in the old mare's mane when he had gone. Placide had kept his word!

Oh, the efficacy of prayer! A tear ran down her cheek. She caught her breath, and laughed softly. Then she humbly gave thanks.

Honorine turned her head inquiringly and nickered softly. Toinette put out her hand and stroked the mare's cold muzzle, but she did not look up. Again she repeated the brief prayer.

II

In the past, Toinette had always been eager to go to Vienna, but as she drove away from the cabin to-day, she glanced back regretfully. The road followed the bay shore until it reached the woods to which the children of St. Mary's parish came in summer for their picnics.

Once safely screened from her grandfather's eyes, the girl pulled Honorine to a stop. Standing up on the seat of the wagon, her eyes swept the rolling lake for sight of the distant speck which would be the Héloïse.

Her search was unrewarded. She got down and picked up the reins; and then she dropped them and climbed up again to scan the lake once more. There was only heaving water and leaden sky.

Had her grandfather been mistaken? Was Placide really out there?

The tops of the great trees were thrashing to and fro. Old Honorine sniffed the wind uneasily, and when Toinette gave the word, she broke into a sharp trot.

A half hour later they were out of the woods and away from the booming of the surf. Now the road ran between low, unfenced fields of marsh hay.

It was a desolate scene, yet not without beauty of a sort, wild, mysterious. But

Toinette had looked upon it so often that it made no impression on her to-day.

In a near-by slough was a muskrat house not yet completed. Its walls were thick, and already three feet high—sure sign of a hard winter.

Coming to Sulphur Creek, the girl got out and led Honorine across the shaky wooden bridge which was without side railings. Cameo Mulosh, returning one night from Vienna, and doubtless in liquor, had driven off the edge and been drowned.

The old structure rattled and groaned as the mare crossed. For months Toinette had avoided the bridge after dark; but there was little likelihood of escaping it this night. She whipped Honorine into a sharp trot.

It was only a half mile from Sulphur Creek to Amador's shanty on Muddy Creek, and the girl soon caught sight of a man taking a punt out of the water. She recognized him as Amador, from his peculiar limp.

The old man was tall and thin, his skin the color and texture of tanned leather. He and his brother claimed that their grandmother was an Indian woman.

In point of years, Amador and Antoine were older than Grandfather Chevalier. Amador appeared frail; his crippled leg accentuating this impression. And yet, as Toinette watched, he dragged the punt up the bank close to the shanty door.

"Are you going to take it to bed with you, Amador?" she asked with a laugh.

He wiped his forehead with his coat sleeve, for, even though the day was cold, he was perspiring, and chuckled as he pondered the question.

"I guess some folks along the bay will be doing that to-night," he said, his eyes twinkling and lighting up his usually grave face. "We have nothing to fear, here on Muddy Creek. Is the water beginning to rise along the bay?"

"Not yet," Toinette replied.

"It will; that wind smells bad to me. We may get some high water even here. I'm going to pick up things a little before night."

The place needed to be put in order. Even a new plow, bought that spring, lay rusting in a corner of the small patch of potato land. Oars, wooden decoys, seines, and tools littered the unboarded space beneath the shanty.

Chickens had the run of the place, nest-

ing where fancy dictated, and finding their own feed. Amador's horse also ran free. The brothers, however, lavished attention on their boats, of which there were not less than six.

The crude life of the marsh had made these men more at home on the water than on the land. If they were poor while their neighbors were prosperous, it was only because they sought to reap a living without sowing. They worked hard.

"You are going to Vienna, Toinette?" Amador asked.

"Yes."

"Ask Sam Drouillard to give you a sack of flour for me, Toinette—fifty pounds. You won't need any money. I was going over to Bonvouillors to-night for the old man's birthday, but I'll wait until you get back."

"You can't go to Bonvouillors' to-night, Amador. Grandfather wants you to come to the bay with your fiddle. Captain Labadee will be there."

"What! What!" Amador cried, excitedly. "This time of the year? Captain Labadee—hum!"

Toinette knew that she blushed as Amador lifted his eyebrows knowingly.

"He never found it necessary to come so late before, did he, Toinette?" the old man queried, a mocking note in his voice.

She was on the defensive at once. "Why do you grin at me, Amador?" she demanded. "Captain Labadee's business is his own affair."

"Yes? Well, he knows the risk he runs! He doesn't play the fool without knowing it."

The girl dropped her gaze.

"Little Toinette—stretching her wings, eh?" the old man murmured, more to himself than to her. And then he said aloud:

"Remember, little one, it is a foolish dove that tries to fly with the hawk."

Stung with amazement, Toinette drew herself up. She realized that Amador had surprised her in her secret. She was on guard instantly.

"What are you trying to say, Amador?" she inquired innocently.

He did not answer at once, his eyes trying to beat her down. Then a kindly smile broke over his face.

"Toinette," he said, "when I come to your place, nobody expects anything from me but a little music for the dance. But when I've had four or five good drinks, it

makes me young again. Maybe that is why I understood the way you looked at Placide the last time he was here. Some one else must have understood it, too! Xavier's father asked me, the other day, if there was anything between you and Captain Labadee."

"Amador!" Toinette gasped. "What did you say?"

"Nothing. I know Sam Drouillard; you can't argue with him. I told him you were young and pretty, and a good girl—and that you would make Xavier a fine wife."

"No, no!" Toinette's hands flew to her ears to shut out this suggestion. "I hate Xavier Drouillard."

"Sam is a rich man, Toinette, and Xavier will get it all some day. I know the boy is ugly, and if you won't have him, why, there is Cleophas. He's a fine lad. There are plenty of good boys around Vienna. Don't distress yourself over Placide. I know his kind; he will break your heart!"

Amador's intentions were kindly, and yet she resented his verdict. Hot words leaped to her lips in defense of Placide, but emotion choked her, and she turned her face away so that the old man might not see how he had hurt her.

"You love the Canadian already," he murmured, as if expecting no reply.

Toinette turned upon him, her wet eyes blazing.

"Yes, I love him!" she announced proudly. "I am not ashamed of it."

"Forgive me, little one," Amador pleaded. "Don't be angry with your old friend. Maybe, by the time Placide comes next spring, you will have changed your mind. If not, marry him—no matter what your grandfather says."

"Grandfather!" Toinette gasped. "Does he know?"

"No! He watches you so closely that he blinds himself."

"But he may know," the girl insisted. "He has been angry with me for three or four days. He seemed to know that Placide would come."

Amador pondered, apparently trying to determine for himself whether Grandfather Chevalier had become suspicious or not.

"Well," he ventured, "if he knows, there will be trouble to-night. It would be like him to say nothing to you if he thought Placide would come. He would wait like a

cat until he could get his claws into him. I've known Joe Chevalier for forty years, and he never forgives."

"You think he may know, then?" Toinette asked anxiously.

"I doubt that he does," Amador declared encouragingly. "At any rate he'll meet his match in Placide. The captain has friends among us; and some of his men will stand by him."

"I am glad," Toinette said simply.

"But they are mad—the whole pack of them—if they run inside the bay to-night, with this wind behind them," Amador declared. "He will lose his boat."

"He can run up the creek," the girl suggested hopefully.

"The Héloïse draws too much water—but he may risk it. Everything thrown away for a pretty face! The man must love you, Toinette!"

"Amador!" she cried. "Why do you frighten me so? Even grandfather says there is no better sailor on the Great Lakes than Placide."

"He'll have a chance to prove that to-night. But you go, now. Antoine will be here to help you with the flour. He'll let you have a lantern. Be careful crossing Sulphur Creek."

"You will come to grandfather's? And ask Julie and Delphine and the others?"

"Sure! Sure!"

Toinette picked up the reins mechanically and clucked to the mare.

"Use your whip!" Amador called after her. "It will be raining before you get to Vienna!"

III

VIENNA—now called Erie—was scarcely more than a hamlet in those days. Its inhabitants were a devout people, and had suckled a hatred of aristocrats from their mothers' breasts. Prosperous or poor, they were one—without castes.

Father Braire interpreted the laws of God and man, and he never failed to send his charges away uplifted and enlightened. Like all French-Canadian peasants, they were devout.

Vienna had been built about the four corners where the road to Samaria crosses the highway which runs between Toledo and Detroit. An old gristmill occupied the southwest corner. The small, white house of Louis Ritchie, the justice of the peace, was on the northwest corner.

On the two corners across the highway stood the rival general stores and bars of Daniel La Pointe and Samuel Drouillard. La Pointe's place was a rambling one-story frame building. A more pretentious building, built of brick, and two stories high, served Drouillard.

In many ways Drouillard's place overshadowed La Pointe's, although the latter's bar was more popular. Sam Drouillard would have given anything he owned to have changed this.

He knew that Dan, who was one of his own "best customers," often stood at his bar, surrounded by a sympathetic audience, and made fun of Drouillard's home—an imposing affair of brick and sandstone, with an iron lion in the front yard.

Dan intimated that his listeners, or, at least, their friends, had paid for all that splendor.

And in pointing out his competitor's home, La Pointe subtly called attention to the aristocratic pretensions of its owner. When this failed of effect, he turned his attention to Xavier Drouillard—and everybody resented the boy's arrogance.

There were other businesses in Vienna, a third saloon, a harness shop, the little place where Wilfrid Benoit's widow sold notions, and Etienne Recor's forge. The church, a brick structure, surmounted by a white wooden steeple, and the *cure's* house, stood in back of Drouillard's store.

The blacksmith shop, where Cleophas Recor and his father toiled long hours, was across the road from the church. The wide doors were left open, except when it stormed.

Cleophas came out, now, to close them, for rain had begun to fall. He saw a horse and wagon approaching, and a second glance convinced him that it was Honorine, with Toinette driving.

The girl had not spared the mare since leaving Muddy Creek, although several times she had been tempted to turn back to the bay to warn Placide Labadee of his great danger.

But wisdom had whispered that he would not be turned back; that he had come with a jest for death upon his lips.

Toinette was primitive enough to warm to this thought. The picture of Placide fighting her ogre of a grandfather for her hand became the more attractive the longer she beheld it.

Cleophas waited in the rain until the

girl passed, but she did not glance in his direction. When he saw that she was not going to put the mare in the long shed in back of the church, he returned to his work, his smile flown.

Toinette had seen the young blacksmith from afar. But Cleophas was always waiting there, a doglike devotion in his eyes. It was this humility, and nothing else, that had made Toinette treat him so shamefully—so femininely.

There were other pretty girls living around Vienna, and they liked to steal sly glances at Cleophas, his strong arms bare to the elbows, and his broad, hairy chest bulging from his carelessly opened shirt, as he swung his hammer. He could have had the pick of them, yet he waited patiently for Toinette.

She had taken a vain pleasure in the situation. But as she drove on to-day, she reproached herself for having made game of Cleophas. He was a great, immovable rock, rising above the tumultuous sea which was tossing her about.

Just as she reached the rear of Drouillard's store, Father Braire turned the corner of the building on his way home. He was without an umbrella, but he held his head up in the beating rain, and his steps were unhurried. There was no loss of dignity; he was always the priest.

His serenity was in such contrast to the excitement which gripped Toinette that she found it hard to take her eyes away from him. She prayed that he might not recognize her.

He had always had the truth from her, and she knew he would have it now. She did not want to tell him the truth. When Father Braire hailed her, she quailed.

"So, Antoinette! You would go by without speaking to me?" he remarked good-naturedly.

Toinette gave him a frightened glance, and made the sign of the cross.

"No—no—father," she murmured helplessly. "The—the rain."

The *cure* shook his head solemnly, but gradually a grin crept over his round face.

"So, it's the rain, eh?" he asked, his tone as naïve as a schoolgirl's. "It is difficult to see the good father when it rains—he is so small and thin! I notice, though, that girls have no trouble in seeing the young men."

He regarded her in mock severity for a second. "Do you find that true?"

Toinette was so ill at ease that she could only nod her head in abashment. Could this talk of young men concern Placide? And the rain—would Father Braire stand there forever? His cassock was soaked.

In a panicky attempt to make her escape, she exclaimed:

"But, father, you are getting wet!"

He smiled, the raindrops running down his shining cheeks in little rivulets. "I do not mind it." He fixed her with his eyes. "Haven't you a little surprise for me, my child?"

"A—a surprise?" Toinette felt her knees shake. "I—I—no, father!"

"What are you doing here, then?" he demanded. "Why do you come to town in such weather?"

Toinette recognized his tone; it was the one he reserved for sinners. Speech was beyond her for the moment.

Then, to her amazement, he broke into laughter so hearty that his plump body shook.

"Come!" he cried, still rocking with merriment. "Don't try to fool the good father, Antoinette. I know that you do not come to Vienna for nothing when a northeaster is setting in. If you have no surprise for me, maybe I have one for you. Xavier Drouillard came home to-day!"

"Ah!" Toinette's gasp was a mixture of relief and anger.

Did the *cure* think that she had come to see Xavier Drouillard? Without knowing it, her lips curled scornfully as she repeated the name to herself. He could come home a hundred times, for all that she cared. She would run away—do anything—rather than marry him.

For the first time in her life, Toinette questioned the wisdom of the clergy. For endless minutes she had expected to hear Placide Labadee's name fall from the *cure's* lips—and he had been concerned only with Xavier Drouillard!

She opened her mouth, and a strange sound issued. It was neither laugh nor shout, but there was gladness in it.

Father Braire chuckled to himself, for he caught the note of relief in her cry. He was not ignorant of Captain Labadee.

It was his way always to say less than he knew. He had been waiting for Toinette to show that he had not hurt her, for notwithstanding the delight he took in teasing the young women and men of his parish, he was the soul of kindness.

"You are a good girl, Antoinette," he said. "My blessing—"

The girl lowered her head as he made the sign of the cross and uttered his Latin phrases. The words were without meaning to her, but to her mind the language was religious, and she was at once fortified and uplifted.

Her eyes flashed at thought of what she would say to old Sam Drouillard if he tried to bully her. She did not doubt for a moment that he had sent for Xavier.

She hated him for that, and for having spied on Placide and her. Without intending to, she struck Honorine so sharp a blow with the whip that the old mare snorted and reared.

Toinette tightened her grip on the reins and threw her body back. She wished that it was Papa Drouillard's hair that she was pulling.

IV

In pleasant weather the idle young men usually gathered beneath the wooden awning in front of Drouillard's store. Toinette had often colored to their lightly flung chaff. She was agreeably surprised to find that the rain had dispersed them to-day.

The girl tied Honorine to the hitching rack and briskly entered the store. She did not know just what she would say to the Drouillards, save that it would be sharp.

It rather nettled her to find that Xavier had not materialized. She looked about quickly, wondering where he was.

A swinging door led to the barroom. She could hear the murmur of voices there, but the store itself appeared deserted.

It often happened that Sam and his clerk, Hilarion Navarre, found it necessary to leave the store to its own devices. A bell rope, working over pulleys attached to the ceiling, led to the center of the store, so that customers could announce their presence. Toinette pulled the rope savagely three or four times.

Mr. Drouillard abruptly appeared at the rear of the store, his eyebrows raised questioningly, for he disliked being summoned so peremptorily. He was small of stature, but he moved quickly and fairly radiated assurance.

His bullet-shaped head, with its thatch of tightly curled iron-gray hair, and his alert blue eyes bespoke the man's indomitable will. A small mustache, further

dwarfed by the generous proportions of his round face, was one of his few vanities.

Although old Sam's laugh was hearty, and his advice always optimistic, there were those who questioned his sincerity. Needless to say, they were the ones who had felt his wrath.

The change which came over him as he recognized the girl was effected almost instantly. The transition from shadow to sunshine was so complete that Toinette smiled in spite of herself.

"It's you, Toinon!" he exclaimed, rubbing his palms together unctuously as he came toward her. "Xavier is home; he is done with Monroe. He will be glad to see you, Toinon."

Toinette's eyes kindled on hearing herself addressed as Toinon. Xavier's father could not have made a more unfavorable beginning.

Toinon was the peasant name for Antoinette, and common enough in distant Quebec, but she hated the sound of it. He had used the name before, and then, as now, she interpreted it as patronizing.

She was mistaken—but youth often is. Samuel Drouillard had called Toinette's mother Toinon. She had been dead many years, and Rene Chevalier, the man for whom she had jilted Samuel, was buried beside her.

Sam was anxious to have his son wed Toinette, and there were many who wondered what prompted him. Some whispered that it only proved that Grandpa Joe Chevalier had a fortune put away.

Others said the lawyers must have found there was money coming to Toinette from her mother's side, the Gagniers, of Monroe. Trust Sam Drouillard to know!

No one guessed the truth. Drouillard was trying to assuage the hurt that the earlier Toinon had given him. In Toinette he saw a hostage for the love which he had been denied, but which, through his son, would be satisfied.

The impulse which motivated him was largely selfish, but there was something fine about it, too. Toinette and Xavier should share his money together.

The very fact that the girl could not discover the reason for his interest in her made her suspicious of him. It also added to her dislike for his son.

"So you call me Toinon, eh?" she demanded sharply. "You know what my name is!"

Drouillard had seen her angry before, so he was not dismayed. He laughed at what to him was only a childish thing.

"Don't you be ashamed of Toinon," he said, reprovingly. "It was good enough for your mother. Tell me what is wrong with it."

"I was christened Antoinette, and I'll be called no less than Toinette! I hate that peasant Toinon!"

And yet, she suddenly thought, if Placide called her Toinon she would not mind it at all.

"Ho! Ho!" Drouillard exclaimed. "You are no peasant, Toinon. But if you were—what of it? Don't let these American ways turn your head. When I go to Detroit or Toledo, I am the first one to tell people what I am. Sometimes a man will say to me, 'Mr. Drouillard, you are a Frenchman, eh?' 'No,' I tell him, 'I am a French-Canadian.'"

He brought his fist down on his counter with a resounding bang.

"Toinon, you will be the richest girl between here and Monroe before long. You'll be able to dress in the finest of silks. You will have to be a great lady—because it seems to me that Xavier has come home with his head full of ideas like yours!"

It was not so much the picture he painted as the assurance with which he brushed it in that caused Toinette's cheeks to blanch. He was so matter-of-fact that he took her breath away for a moment.

"Xavier may come and go as he pleases," she retorted angrily. "I have not said I would marry him!"

"No, Toinon; but you will. Your grandfather wishes it. And Xavier will make you a good husband. Where else could you find the like of him?"

He asked this question with honest pride. The girl replied with a scornful toss of her dark head.

"You will have everything a girl can want—clothes, money, a good farm, and some day this business, and my house—the best house anywhere between Toledo and Monroe."

"So you would have me marry a house! You think so much of it, you had better keep it!"

In times past Toinette had angered him with less than this, and she expected him to thunder at her now. When he merely shook his head gently, a feeling akin to awe of him swept over her.

"No," he said at last, "I am not asking you to marry a house; it is my dear son I am asking you to marry. My heart is set on it. Xavier will wed you, or he will not get a penny from me. But he is a good boy; he loves you, Toinon."

"He loves me, eh?" she asked, rallying-ly. Mischief danced in her eyes. "Why do you have to speak for him? Why isn't he here?"

"That's the boy of it—he runs away from the thing he wants most. He went out to the farm at noon. He has a fast horse now. Xavier will be down to the bay quick enough!"

"After he has shown off his horse, eh?" Toinette laughed with fine contempt.

"But he did not expect you would come to town to-day."

Hilarion, the clerk, came in from the warehouse then, and Drouillard and he set about getting the provisions for which Toinette had come.

The size of the order aroused Sam's suspicions, and his brow grew darker and darker. When Hilarion went out to put the articles in Toinette's wagon, Drouillard demanded:

"So your grandfather expects some one to-night?"

Toinette had been gazing at a show case devoted to jewelry. She looked up too quickly to hide her surprise.

"It's late—late for any one to come," she replied lamely.

"There's only one fool rash enough to try it," Drouillard declared. "You know who I mean—Placide Labadee!"

They faced each other in fury across the counter in the growing dusk. The girl was resolved that he should not have the truth from her, and the man was equally intent on having his surmise confirmed.

"My grandfather does not consult me about his business," Toinette asserted hotly. "How should I know who comes?"

"But you know! Your manner tells me so plainer than words. It is Captain Labadee who is coming! Why do you blush if it is not so?"

"I have no cause to blush," Toinette said, defiantly.

"But you do! You think you are in love with this man."

Drouillard shook a finger as if pronouncing an excommunication.

"A smuggler—a fly-by-night—here to-day and gone to-morrow! What can La-

badee give you? Have you become entirely mad?"

Toinette lost all sense of discretion.

"You call him a smuggler!" she cried. "You who take a profit on the whisky he smuggles! And you spy on me, thinking to make me love your son. You are mad; not I. I hate the sight of your son. My mother wouldn't marry a Drouillard, and neither will I!"

Toinette could not know how deep she sank the knife into Sam Drouillard's heart. It needed only this to crystallize his purpose; he would let nothing stand in the way of his desire now.

"Your grandfather laughed at me when I warned him," he said, pityingly. "He'll not laugh to-night; nor will you."

"My grandfather knows!" Toinette gasped, her face ashen.

"You tell him that Xavier and I will be there this evening," he added, as if he had not heard her exclamation.

Toinette fumbled with the buttons of her coat as she fastened it about her neck. Hilarion came in, his clothes white, for the rain had turned to snow.

But it was not the sight of Hilarion that caused her to draw in her breath sharply. Cleophas Recor was standing just inside the doorway.

Cleophas had washed his hands and face and put on his coat before leaving his father's shop. His expression was so tense that Toinette knew he had overheard the bitter talk.

"Is there anything I can do for you, Cleophas," Drouillard demanded angrily.

"No; I was just waiting to speak to Toinette," the blacksmith replied evenly.

He held the door open for her and followed her out.

"You should not have stayed so long," he said as he untied the mare. "It's night now. With the snow so heavy, you will not be able to see ten feet ahead."

Toinette was amazed as he lifted his foot to climb into the wagon.

"Move over," he said. "I'm going to take you home. The wind is blowing harder all the time. If we get across Sulphur Creek, we will be lucky."

He took the reins out of Toinette's protesting hands. Cleophas had never been like this before.

"I can get home alone," she insisted.

"I'll go with you this night," Cleophas declared, calmly.

He brandished the whip over Honorine, and the old mare broke into a trot that soon carried them away from Vienna.

V

TOINETTE was thankful for the storm as she and Cleophas rode along. Silence had settled upon them, deepening with the passing miles, until it became a barrier which neither was willing to scale. The snow, at least, gave the girl an excuse for holding her head averted.

She wanted to arrange her disordered thoughts, to review the last few hours, to contemplate what the night would bring, to prepare herself for meeting Placide Labadee. The effort came to naught; in her mind was chaos.

They had almost reached Amador's shanty when, without warning, Cleophas said:

"Are you sure that you love Placide?"

His voice sounded hollow, and tired, and hopeless. She was suddenly aware that she had no desire to hurt him.

"So you heard!" she remarked wearily. She saw him nod his head. "You are not going to be against me, too, are you, Cleophas, my friend?"

"No; I'm thinking only of you, Toinette. I want you to be happy. You are sure you will never marry Xavier?"

"I swear it!"

"I'm glad. You would never be happy with him. I—I never could stand losing you to Xavier Drouillard."

Toinette's tender heart went out to the young man beside her. She wanted to mother him, to atone for the many indignities he had suffered at her hands. Moved by a rush of feeling, she placed her hand over his.

"My friend—my very good friend," she murmured, and there were tears in her eyes.

Cleophas trembled under her touch. Minutes passed, and then he asked:

"But Placide—you love him?"

"I love him." Her confession was hardly more than a whisper.

Toinette did not hear the gasp which the wind whipped away from Cleophas's lips.

Soon they came to Amador's shanty, and left the sack of flour and took the lantern which Antoine had ready. They were nearly to Sulphur Creek when Toinette spoke.

"Even you, Cleophas, have no good

word for Placide. Why is it that those who once were so friendly to him turn against him now? Is it because of me?"

"They are afraid for you, Toinette," he replied slowly. "But I have nothing against Placide. If you love him, I want you to have him. But he shall answer to me if he betrays your trust."

A few minutes later he handed the reins to the girl, and went ahead on foot, the lantern flaring fitfully in the driving snow. He was back presently, his face serious.

"The water is over the bridge," he reported. "I walked across, but the current is strong."

He caught the mare's bridle and led her forward. At the creek side he paused and said casually:

"Get down, Toinette. I'll take you across first."

He reached up his arms and clasped them around her. Toinette looked down and saw the water running white over the bridge floor.

Cleophas struck across boldly, the water nearly to his knees. When he reached the opposite bank he put her down reluctantly.

"I'll get the mare now," he said, and strode again into the flood.

Toinette could hear him talking to Honorine, urging her on; but apparently the nervous animal held back. Then there came the sharp crack of the whip, and a wild splashing followed.

The girl heard Cleophas's warning cry, and, as she leaped aside, the mare dashed past. He was standing up in the wagon, the reins wrapped around his hands.

"The bridge is going!" he cried, and even as he spoke the snapping of timbers and the roar of rushing water filled the air.

When he had brought the mare to a halt, he came back and stood beside Toinette. He held up the lantern, and they peered into the empty darkness.

"Not a stick left," Cleophas muttered. "The Drouillards will never get across this night."

"I wouldn't want anything to happen to them, Cleophas." Toinette's gaze searched his face.

"Their horse will warn them. To get to the bay they would have to go around by La Salle."

There was nothing they could do but go on. Soon the sound of the pounding surf reached their ears.

When they came to the bay, Toinette

strained her eyes for a glimpse of a light that would tell her the Héloïse had arrived. Once she was sure she saw it, but the next moment it was gone, snuffed out in the swirling snow.

Cleophas hurried the mare along. Light streamed from the cabin windows as they drove up. The shrill whining of a fiddle announced that Amador was there.

Between them they unloaded the wagon, and then Cleophas went on to the barn and put up the mare. Left to herself, Toinette ran to the door which led from the kitchen to the main room of the cabin, and peeked in. Only Amador was there, seated before a great log fire and busily tuning up his instrument.

The sound of voices on the beach caught her ear, and she tiptoed to the window and pressed her face against the glass. Men were running a yawl out of the water. A half dozen others stood about, watching them and giving advice.

Toinette recognized her grandfather's voice. Hardly had the yawl been beached when another boat came ashore.

The man at the tiller, swathed in oilskins, was standing up. He gave an order, and his men went over the side of the boat together. A rope was passed ashore, and the boat fairly rode out upon the beach.

Toinette's heart was pounding—the boom of the steersman's voice! It was Placide!

Grandfather Chevalier stepped forward to greet him. Arm in arm, they came toward the house, while the others unloaded the boats and carried the kegs and barrels to an old twine house in back of the cabin.

Toinette knew she must not be found there at the window. She turned to go back to the kitchen, but Amador had discovered her.

"He is here, Toinette!" he exclaimed. "You are shaking like a leaf. Do you want your grandfather to see how excited you are?"

"He knows, Amador! Sam Drouillard told—"

The words died on her lips as Placide Labadee opened the door.

The spirit of the raging storm entered with the Canadian. He laid violent hands upon the heavy door and flung it back out of his way, and strode in, his pace unchecked, a white fury swirling about him. Grandfather Chevalier was just behind, his beard crusted with snow.

Placide saw Toinette, frozen to marble, standing before him. He stopped in his tracks with head thrown back, the sternness of his face melting.

For a long moment no one spoke. The noise of the storm seemed to lessen, and a charged stillness crept into the room.

Amador, his strong old body tensed, glanced from Placide to Toinette, and then to Joe Chevalier.

The grandfather's eyes were cold and deep. He seemed to appraise each attitude and expression, and to make his own answers to his unasked questions. It was as if fate had dealt the cards, and Chevalier was slyly peering into his opponent's hand.

Some sixth sense must have warned Placide, for he gave up any pretense of dissembling. A smile wreathed his lips.

"My lady!" he said loudly.

Toinette trembled at the sound of his voice. Amador caught his breath at the Canadian's boldness. So might a knight have greeted the daughter of a hostile feudal lord.

Captain Labadee swept off his sou'wester and brushed the floor with it as he bowed low before the girl, with the grace of a *grand seigneur*.

With a word, he had transformed that humble cabin into a baronial hall for Toinette. Through a mist of joy, she saw his flashing white teeth, his dauntless eyes, and the smile of him—the utterly reckless smile, hinting of hazards lightly taken, of warnings ignored.

Grandfather Chevalier was staring at Labadee through narrowed lids. Amador's expression was coldly challenging. And yet Placide continued to smile.

Toinette saw the proud defiance in his eyes. It was as if he were telling her grandfather to make the most of the moment, to read into it whatever he pleased.

And as she stood there, her knees shaking, Placide stepped forward and raised her fingers to his lips.

Then he snapped erect, and wheeled on Joe Chevalier, as if to surprise a look on his face.

"There!" Captain Labadee laughed lightly. "You know why I have come, Chevalier! And yet you talk to me of profit. Does a man risk his life for a few dollars?"

Grandfather Chevalier met his gaze squarely, and he smiled, too; but his smile said one thing, and his eyes another.

Placide turned to Amador. "I am glad to see you again, old fiddler," he said.

Cleophas came in as Labadee and Amador shook hands. He was always welcome at Chevalier's cabin. He explained his presence there, and told them briefly about the bridge.

Toinette expected him to offer his hand to Placide, but the two tall young men merely nodded coldly to each other.

"You can thank Cleophas that you are alive, Toinette," Amador declared. "That bridge has been falling apart for years. Somebody will have to build a new one now."

"Why talk about bridges?" Chevalier remarked. "You and I were here when there weren't any bridges, Amador; and we'll be here some time yet. Go to the kitchen, Toinette; make us such a supper as you have never made before. I want the best, and plenty of everything. These men are my friends. I know how to treat a friend—good food and drink—music—dancing—pretty girls!"

His voice arose as he was carried away by emotion.

"Let the wind blow!" he roared. "We are warm and dry; what do we care if it storms! We have had many good times here at Joe Chevalier's. My memory is filled with them. But to-night we must outdo ourselves. I want every one to know how much I appreciate Captain Labadee's friendship!"

He was addressing Toinette, but she knew his words were not for her ears. She sensed a threat that held her rooted to the floor. Her grandfather reached over and picked Placide's hat off the long table.

"You are superstitious, captain?" he asked, as he handed the sou'wester to him.

"A hat on the table—a wedding." Placide laughed.

"I have heard it said that it meant a death," Grandfather Chevalier chuckled.

Turning to Toinette once more, he said:

"There are twelve of us—thirteen with Cleophas. Thirteen!" He paused, and his eyes went from the girl to Placide.

"Well," he went on, "set the table for thirteen. We'll see who is the unlucky one!"

VI

GRANDFATHER CHEVALIER soon found tasks outside for Cleophas and Amador. When he was alone with Placide he turned

to him and grinned, his shrewd old eyes narrowed into a cunning squint.

"So, you are here again, captain," he remarked, and his casual tone dismissed whatever had been said until now.

Labadee stiffened, and then he laughed, as if to ignore the tension the old man's apparently innocent remark had brought.

"Here—and none the worse for it," he replied, making light of what he had done. "It was nothing."

"Of course, it is nothing," Chevalier agreed. "Both of us understand that. I've taken such chances many times. But my people will not forget it. They will talk for ten years about how you brought the Héloïse in to-night. It is the kind of thing that wins them, this game of touch-and-go with death!" He grunted derisively. "The fools!"

"Fools," Placide echoed carelessly, as he unfastened the buckles of his oilskin coat.

Grandfather Chevalier glanced up sharply, wondering if Captain Labadee were including him.

"Sit down, captain," he suggested heartily. "I've got a bottle of cognac that was old when I was a boy. I've been saving it; but there may never be a better occasion."

A little addition, off the large room of the cabin, held Grandfather Chevalier's private store of liquors. Placide watched him as he entered it.

In times past, Labadee had felt as much at home in this cabin as on board his schooner, but to-night he stood with his back to the fire, and made no effort to pull off his wet coat. His eyes were never still until Chevalier reappeared with the bottle of cognac.

"There it is!" he exclaimed, as he held it up affectionately. He set out two glasses, and let the golden liquor gurgie into them.

"Captain," he murmured, half bowing to Placide as they drank each other's health.

"The sunshine of France is in it," the old man said as he smacked his lips. "Come, let us drink again. It warms my blood—as a pair of pretty eyes warms yours, captain!"

There was a flat challenge here. Placide started to speak, but Chevalier cut him off.

"Don't deny it!" he thundered. "I am old, but I was young once. Women are only a memory to me—but what a memory!"

He reached out and felt the bulging muscles of Placide's arm. "How like you I was once! At your age I could have done what you did to-night. And I would have done it, too—to keep a promise!"

Labadee was staring out the window into the white night. The old man regarded him sharply.

"You look away, captain. Come! Is it that I understand you better than you understand yourself? You came to keep a promise?"

Grandfather Chevalier hurled the question at him. Placide did not answer at once. When he turned to face the old man, his eyes were less grave than they had been.

"I did," he answered evenly.

"Some of your men are strangers to me, captain. Do these come to keep a promise for you?"

"They follow me without question," Labadee replied. "I am the master of the *Héloise*."

"Then we understand each other, captain," the grandfather announced sneeringly. "*Toinette is not for you!*"

Placide laughed mockingly.

"She must give me my answer!" he retorted sharply. "Not you, Chevalier!"

The table was between them now, and they stood with their arms braced upon it, staring fiercely at each other.

"She is only a child!" the old man declared angrily. "For a month she has been waiting, but she is not for you. A hawk in a dove's nest. No!"

"A hawk?" With careless grace, Labadee threw his leg over the end of the table and sat leaning toward Chevalier. "You do not say that as a compliment, my friend, but I accept it as one. And the crow would stand in the hawk's way, eh? Is it not enough that I love *Toinette*?"

"No, captain!" Grandfather Chevalier cried, his arm uplifted threateningly.

"You would keep her for Sam Drouillard's young ape, eh?" Placide demanded. "Or for this slow-witted Cleophas who—"

"Let me speak!" the old man interrupted sternly. "This is my house; I am master here, as you are aboard your boat. I am old, but my heart is strong. We are strong men together—strong as the storm is strong. We ought to be able to understand each other, eh?"

"Go on," Placide agreed.

"I know you because I know myself.

We have always taken what we wanted—a smile, a kiss. We stop at nothing to get what we want. For instance, you with your boat to-night! And you'll be ready to take the same chance to-morrow with another girl—if you live."

Labadee shrugged indifferently at that final word. The old man eyed him truculently, and went on:

"I remember as though it were yesterday, the spring when I came down the Beaujeu in a bark canoe. The ice had gone out only a day before. You know that river—the rapids strung along it like the beads on a rosary. I'd been in the lumber shanties all winter. A kiss was waiting for me at Fourche—"

"I have heard the story," Captain Labadee interposed. He thumped the table with his fist. "And what better business can a man be about than answering the call of his heart? Are we French for nothing? Love turns our blood to wine!"

Grandfather Chevalier came around the table to stand beside Placide.

"You do not believe it was love that sent me down the Beaujeu, do you?" he demanded hotly. "You know that it was not love. And the thing I see in your eyes now is not love!"

Captain Labadee slid from the table, and they faced each other, eyes locked.

"You are sure, eh?" Placide muttered.

"I am! But I have learned how to keep what is mine."

"You are telling me to go—is that it?"

"No, my friend! Stay as long as it pleases you. Have your kiss if you must; I am not afraid for *Toinette*!"

"And I am not afraid for myself!" Placide flung back at him.

Amador came to the door as they stood there. He called to the old man:

"The twine house is full, Joe. Do you want the rest put in the barn?"

"I'll go with you," Grandfather Chevalier replied, pulling on his coat. Turning to Placide, he said:

"Captain, do as you please. I know you will not complain at the price!"

They had been gone some time before Placide moved a muscle. He laughed, then, poured out a drink of cognac and tossed it off.

Going to the door, he peered out into the snow. The lanterns, bobbing to and fro along the beach, told their own story. He started for the kitchen, a song on his lips.

Toinette did not hear him enter. Although she was busily preparing food for supper, she was so engrossed in thought that her task was mechanical.

"Toinette!" Placide whispered.

Startled, she dropped the empty pan that was in her hands.

"Oh!" she gasped. "Placide!"

"Little one!" He crushed his lips against hers and swept her up into his arms.

Seconds passed, and he did not put her down. It was for this embrace she had waited.

"I have come for you, little wren," he announced.

She put her hands up and held him away from her.

"My grandfather knows," she said. "Your life is in danger here. Xavier Drouillard's father knows, too. He is your enemy, Placide!"

"What of it, Toinette? Here I am, as I said I would be. Let me see you smile, little wren!"

"Placide!" the girl murmured fondly. She pressed the palms of her hands against his wind-tanned cheeks. "I have been so lonely. Every night I have prayed that you would come. Yesterday my love for you was a secret; to-day they all know—Amador, Cleophas—and they have no good word for you."

Placide gazed into her dark eyes.

"You believe in me, little wren!" he said. "I am glad that I came."

He embraced her again.

"We'll laugh at them before this night's much older." He smiled. "Your grandfather would have me believe my schooner is safe until midnight. Why, she's dragging her anchor, and might pile up on the beach inside of two hours—but that is time enough for us. Look at me, Toinette! I'm going to steal you away from under your grandfather's very nose. An hour from now the crowd will be here. When they start to dance, we'll go!"

Toinette's throat was suddenly dry. "The storm—"

"We'll laugh at the wind. I'll take the Héloïse out of here on wings!"

"But your men? They're afraid of my grandfather."

"Some of them are not. They'll be ready when I say the word. Let Xavier Drouillard come; let your grandfather rage; and this overgrown Cleophas, let him

scowl. We'll be in Canada by daylight. Will you trust me, little wren?"

The girl's face was white. To go with him had been her dream; but, now that she must make her decision, she was voiceless.

"But—but the priest," she managed to whisper. "Father Braire—"

"No; he'll marry you to no one but Xavier Drouillard! There are many priests in Canada, and just as good as Father Braire. Will you come, Toinette?"

Ages passed as she gazed into his eyes. It was as if she hoped to read the future in them, to solve the enigmas of life. She had lately felt that she must die unless he came across the lake to her, and now—

Emotions bequeathed her by unknown, wild-blooded ancestors urged her on. This man was to be her mate.

"I will be ready, Placide." The sound of her voice surprised her; it was almost as if another woman had spoken.

Placide raised his finger to his lips.

"The window," said his eyes. "Some one is there!"

He cautiously put his hand out in back of him, and turned the doorknob.

"I will give you the signal, little wren," he whispered, "when we are to go to the Héloïse."

Captain Labadee stepped out and pulled the door shut behind him. As it closed, a lance of yellow flame stabbed the darkness of the night.

Toinette screamed.

The gale snuffed out the report of the gun, but it could not deaden the sound of the falling body which thudded against the door.

VII

TOINETTE did not cry out again, but a sound fought its way through her fear-constricted throat. It was more than a whimper, for it was as savage as it was despairing. She threw herself against the door, and spread wide her hands as if to bar the way to death.

How clearly she could see Placide lying in the wet snow, life slipping away from him with every tick of the clock! She raised her eyes, but she did not pray.

Hers was an accusing stare. Why had God permitted this to happen?

She asked herself if it was for this that she had prayed. Was this the reward granted to the faithful? Or was this her punishment for asking Placide to come?

The thought strangled her. It was her fault! She saw that now. She had asked Placide to come—and he was dead! How heavily his body had thudded against the door—

Perhaps her grandfather had not fired the shot. But what did that matter? Nothing could bring Placide back.

For the first time she realized that her lover would never return. Invisible hands pushed her down, but she clutched the door and braced her faltering knees.

Even now Placide might be looking down at her from that very pleasant heaven of Father Braire's. The thought did not lessen the ache in her heart.

In the flesh, the Canadian had been all that she desired. His wavy black hair had invited her fingers, his warm red lips had claimed hers so tenderly, his strong arms had drawn her so close that it seemed her heart must stop its beating, yet had beat the stronger.

Sam Drouillard and her grandfather were to blame for her great loss. They must answer to her for what they had done.

Toinette found her knees strong again.

She put her ear to the door and listened before she opened it. Only the booming of the surf and the screaming of the wind reached her.

Inch after inch she opened the door. A gasp was wrung from her as she saw Placide lying there, his arm flung over his face. She sank beside him. A mighty sob shook her.

"Placide!" she groaned. "Placide!"

Her eyes were blinded with tears, but she found his mouth and kissed him. His lips were warm!

For a moment her heart stopped beating. Placide's dead lips had returned her kiss! She raised her head, startled, and at once a great arm encircled her and drew her down again.

Toinette opened her mouth to scream, but the cry never left her throat. For now she saw that Placide was alive, with a merry light in his eyes.

"Holy Mother of God!" she breathed. "I thought you were dead!"

"I am not even hurt." He laughed as he released her.

"And you can laugh?" she demanded through her tears.

"Ah, little wren, this is something to laugh about." His tone became very ten-

der. "You thought I was dead, and you prayed for me—but why cry now?"

Toinette did not answer at once. She was angry with herself for having been so quick to picture him dead, and vexed with him, too, for his indifference to death.

"Who was it?" she demanded. "Who shot at you?"

Placide shrugged his broad shoulders as he got up.

"I wonder," he said. "I've been lying in the snow, hoping the marksman would come to see how good his aim was."

"You take it lightly, Placide. If the bullet had been an inch lower, you would be dead."

"That bullet went where it was intended to go. This was a warning of what I can expect unless I give you up, Toinette."

"Was it my grandfather?" she asked.

"No! His hands shake too much. He would not have missed so cleverly at fifty yards."

"You know who it was, don't you?" she insisted.

Placide smiled at her earnestness.

"No," he replied. "But it will not make any difference to you or me, Antoinette—will it?"

He put his arms around her for a long, breathless minute. When she looked up her eyes were clear.

"I am thinking of you, Placide," she said. "It is my fault that you are in danger. If I should go with you—"

"No man shall stop us!" he interrupted. "You have not changed your mind?"

"How could I, loving you as I do? But your life is more precious to me than my own, Placide."

"What is my life worth unless I can share it with you, Toinette?"

"You do love me!" she murmured, deep within his arms.

"Tell me, Placide, is it wrong for me to want to go with you?"

She thought he was long in answering, and, in truth, he was. Her innocence locked his lips.

His eyes strayed to her face, to her firm throat, and the hint of rounded breasts, which her dress could not conceal.

"Is love wrong?" he asked, dramatically. "Is life wrong? No! Live and love, then!"

"But why do they want to keep me here, Placide?"

"Your grandfather knows nothing of

love. When he talks to you about Xavier Drouillard, he tells you how rich he is—never how happy you will be. And I have no farms, no fine house. What can he hope to get from me?"

All this was exactly what Toinette thought, and it increased her resentment against her grandfather and Samuel Drouillard and his son. It fortified her for what she proposed doing.

"Smile, Toinette!" Placide pleaded. "And when you go back to the kitchen, sing. Let them see you happy and smiling. Your grandfather, and old Amador, and Cleophas, will be watching. When the dancing starts, dance, too. If Delphine Roubideaux comes, I'll make her dance, fat as she is. You'll hear me laugh, too, Toinette. And then, the first thing you know, your grandfather will look around—and you and I will be gone."

He opened the door for her, and urged her toward it. Toinette nodded that she understood his instructions. Fearful lest some further doubt arise to assail her, Placide quickly closed the door on himself and turned away.

Toinette stood alone in the kitchen, a bit amazed at finding him gone. Then the smell of burning bread penetrated her consciousness, and she busied herself so that she quite forgot to worry.

Once, unconsciously, the girl broke into song. When she discovered herself doing this, she did not try to check the laugh that bubbled to her lips.

VIII

THE scraping of chairs across the floor, the boisterous laughter, and the good-natured blasphemies, which reached Toinette as she hurried about the kitchen, told her that the men had finished their work and were waiting for their supper. She also heard the clinking of glasses, and knew that her grandfather had broached a barrel.

Whisky would make them more ravenous, and soon they would be calling out rough witticisms to her, demanding food, and expecting her to threaten them for their impatience. It was a game they had played these many years, and the girl knew her rôle quite as well as they did theirs.

It abruptly occurred to her that they must know that some one had fired at Placide. To dissemble in the face of such knowledge would only arouse her grandfather's suspicions.

She knew he would pop into the kitchen any minute, now, to see what was delaying the meal. So, when he opened the door she was prepared for him.

"What takes you so long, Toinette?" he demanded, sniffing the air to detect how far along the cooking was. The appetizing odors reassured him, and his tone was less gruff as he added: "The men are as hungry as wolves."

"There will be plenty," Toinette answered over her shoulder. She saw how keenly he regarded her, and she decided that he was aware of what had happened to Placide.

"Sam Drouillard and Xavier are coming to-night—if they can get here," the girl remarked. "I'll save something for them."

"That's good!" he exclaimed, with great relish. "So Xavier is home again. You didn't tell me that, Toinette."

"The bridge gone—the storm—so much excitement—I forgot."

"He is a good boy, Xavier." He chuckled and rubbed his hands together. Then he walked about the kitchen, his ruddy face buried deep in his beard, and whenever Toinette's attention was engaged elsewhere, he darted appraising glances at her.

"I wonder if they will get here before the captain leaves?" Chevalier queried, casually.

The girl was wondering, too, but she held her voice even as she said: "They will have to go around by La Salle. It's a long way."

Her grandfather was pleased at such matter-of-factness. He came over and stood beside her as she took the bread out of the pans.

"You know, Toinette, you are a beauty," he said bluntly. "I never realized that until to-night. I've got to thank the captain; he opened my eyes! No wonder Xavier could not find any one in Monroe he liked so well. And Cleophas is here, and others will come, too. If Xavier asks you to marry him, don't say 'yes' too quickly!"

He saw the girl catch her breath. His eyes glowed behind their narrowed lids.

"You—you don't want me to—to marry Xavier?" Toinette stammered.

"You would never have to split wood for him or hoe corn," the old man remarked evasively. "But there are other suitors—

and I like to see people in love. Money is good, too. If you can get both, Toinette, you will be a very lucky girl. Otherwise—"

He spread his hands in contempt.

"If you cannot get both, Toinette, don't take love. It's easy to fall in love, and it's easier to fall out. But you are young; there's lots of time. Make Xavier wait until spring."

He squeezed her arm mischievously. "Perhaps the captain will come back next spring! Cleophas will be here, too."

Toinette nearly upset the bouillon in her excitement. Next spring—Placide!

Grandfather Chevalier had said all he intended. What he had not admitted was that he expected to see the Héloïse washed ashore; that Placide would find himself penniless, and that a word to the revenue men would bar him forever from La Plaisance Bay. He also had not said that, after Captain Labadee was out of the way, Xavier Drouillard should marry the girl as quickly as Father Braire would permit.

The men were calling for Toinette, now, and he left her, convinced that she had taken the bait. He had not the slightest suspicion of what Placide proposed.

His keen old eyes had traveled to the Héloïse a hundred times since Placide had come ashore. He knew, by the riding lights, that rapidly she was drifting in.

What he feared was that Labadee might try to make a rendezvous with Toinette, in Toledo or Monroe. He knew the man well enough to know that he would not be easily turned aside from his desire.

The old man believed that Toinette would be reluctant to meet Placide clandestinely, now that she had honest hopes of receiving him as a suitor in the coming spring. That their love-making should actually continue beyond this night was not a possibility.

As Grandfather Chevalier sat down again among Captain Labadee's men, his jovial humor was no longer a pretense.

IX

ON such nights in the past, old Joe Chevalier had sat at the head of his table in a Falstaffian mood, quick of tongue and wit, sure of himself, reading deference in the faces ringed about his board. He had come to believe it was for such moments he lived.

To-night, as he returned the smiles of the hungry, thirsty guests, all eager for his bounty, it seemed impossible that anything

had occurred to change the old order. The king was on his throne.

Toinette came in, a great dish of steaming bouillon in her hands. The men leaned toward her and roared frank compliments to her beauty.

Their eyes were bright from the whisky they had quaffed, and the presence of the girl awakened desire in their hearts. Several reached out to touch her hands.

Toinette placed the heavy dish on the table to fight them off. Victor Cuvillier, the smallest man there, hung on, trying to draw her into his arms. When she energetically pulled away, he sprawled on the floor, to the roaring amusement of his friends.

"I hope you break your head, Victor!" Toinette cried, in mock anger.

The next moment another hairy paw caught her. It was old Eli, the mate of the Héloïse. He had been coming to Joe Chevalier's cabin for twenty years.

"Ah, Toinette!" he laughed. "Where's my kiss?"

"It's in the bouillon," she retorted.

Little Victor was on his feet again, his glass in his hand.

"We drink to you now, Toinette!" he shouted, to make himself heard. He swept the table with his eyes to see that the glasses were full. The men drained them with a flourish.

Eli still held the girl, and smiled broadly as she tried to writhe away. Every one roared when the old sailor dragged her onto his knee and bounced her up and down as he sang:

*"Malbrouck s'en va-t-en guerre—
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine;
Malbrouck s'en va-t-en guerre—
Ne sait quand reviendra."*

His voice shook with merriment. Placide Labadee and the others took up his song, and made the rafters tremble.

"Hey, Victor!" Eli cried. "This is the way to get along with the girls."

He gave Toinette a bearish hug.

The girl screamed, but she was neither angry nor frightened. She knew all this was in fun. Her grandfather was enjoying it as much as any one.

"She's a pretty big armful, Eli," he called across the table. "You can't hold her in one hand any more."

Eli let her slip away then, and Toinette hurriedly filled their plates to silence the chaffing.

With arms spread on the table, they bent over their plates and ate noisily and rapidly. Before the last plate had been filled, the first was asking for a second helping.

Hot bread and bouillon—that was all—but such a bouillon! Not by the widest stretch of the imagination could one have called it a soup.

A dozen canvasback ducks had gone into it. Onions and carrots, potatoes and dumplings—all swimming in a flour-thickened gravy—made it a savory and sustaining dish.

Nowhere else in the world do they make such noble bouillons as in these marshlands of Lake Erie. For a month, now, wild ducks had been the almost daily fare. Soon the birds would be gone south, but muskrats would be there to take their place. In the spring, catfish would be plentiful, and for this particular bouillon the bay people would refuse any other food.

They were hearty eaters. Cleophas Recor passed his plate for a third helping. He was only one of many, for at Joe Chevalier's table all were expected to eat to repletion.

No one thought to speak as he ate. That would be a waste of jaw power.

Toinette went to the kitchen and returned with steaming black coffee in a huge pot. Spoons were few, and, as the sugar bowl traveled up and down the table, the spoon with which they served themselves went into their cups, to stir. Soon the white sugar in the bowl turned brown.

The bread was very good. Some of the diners spread the bouillon over it, and others contented themselves with dipping it into the rich gravy, but each kept a piece by him. When they had nearly finished their bouillon, they put bread on their plates, and swished it about in their fingers until the dishes were clean.

There also was corn-cob sirup, made by boiling the cobs and adding the juice to melted white sugar. It was considered as good as maple sirup.

Grandfather Chevalier filled their glasses again. When they had drained them, they pushed back their chairs and got out their pipes.

They were boisterous, now. They wanted Amador and his fiddle.

"'Brigadier!'" they shouted. "Play 'Brigadier!'"

Amador put all other fiddlers to shame, for he launched into the ringing air with-

out pausing to tune up. They were ready for him, and they swung into it with a roar.

And then they wanted "Alouette." They got up and marched around the room to the tune of it.

"'En Roulant,' Amador!" Captain Labadee shouted.

"Yes, 'En Roulant,'" Grandfather Chevalier urged.

Toinette was clearing away the dishes, and she sang it with them.

*"Derrière chez nous, y a-t-un étang,
En roulant ma boule.
Trois beaux canards s'en vont baignant,
En roulant ma boule.
Rouli, roulant, ma boule roulante,
En roulant ma boule roulante,
En roulant ma boule roulante."*

The Vallette boys, January and February—named for obvious reasons—came then, bringing Julie Picard and Delphine Roubideaux with them.

A noisy welcome greeted Delphine. She was big and buxom, with an air of carnival about her. She shook her fist at Placide.

"So it's you!" she cried. "I knew nobody else would be fool enough to come on such a night."

Labadee put on a hurt expression.

"I'm sorry I came," he said dolefully, "when you treat me like this."

"Pah! You hear that, Toinette? He says he comes to see me! I tell you he's as big a liar—"

"Stop that!" she cried, turning on little Victor, who had slipped an arm around her generous waist. "I'll take you across my knee, if you don't look out!"

Victor was not abashed, for he understood this big girl very well.

"What's the matter, Delphine?" he demanded calmly. "Have you gone back on me?"

She lifted him up and shook him, while the others laughed and shouted and pounded the table with their glasses.

"Spank him, Delphine!" they yelled. "Box his ears."

She succeeded in getting Victor across her knees, and whacked him lustily, but the clown reached up and kissed her.

Delphine laughed and let him go. Then she sniffed loudly and rubbed the back of her hand across her lips, making a wry face.

"I guess you kissed the whisky jug harder than you did me, Victor!" she said, scathingly. "Stingy!"

At once strong drink was offered, if not forced on her, and found her not unwilling. It was the unfailing remedy of this people. When one was sad, liquor brought back the errant smile.

It softened grief, rekindled hope, took the sharp edge off pain, and fortified the weak and suffering. When one was gay it unlocked the doors to romance, made the old courageous, and the young care-free. At times, it was magical.

Their dependence was in it. They were close to it from childhood. They looked upon it as a friendly thing, and never thought to fear it.

Of its virtues, one must judge for himself. Whatever else it did, it brightened lives that were drab—and they were lives that were not drab because of liquor.

The sound of footsteps without sent Grandfather Chevalier to the door.

"Ah, Pacifique—and Azalma!" he exclaimed, on recognizing the latest arrivals. "And what you got there?"

He reached down and lifted up the little fellow hiding behind his mother's skirts.

"My word, François, you are getting to be a big boy! Soon you'll be able to break up wood for your mother, eh?"

He put the lad down, and François shyly stared about, almost lost in the clothes Azalma had made for him from an old suit of his father's. He had been asleep in the boat on the way to the bay, and he blinked his eyes owlishly as Toinette hugged him.

"Shall I put him on your bed until we go, Toinette?" Azalma asked.

"Sure!" Grandfather Chevalier exclaimed. "Toinette will go with you."

When Azalma and Toinette came out of the bedroom, they found Eugene Malbay had come. He smiled as he shook Toinette's hand, but his face never quite lost its look of sadness.

There was something priestly about his thin, well-turned features. His hands, especially, were long and fine, and much unlike the heavy, peasant hands of Pacifique and the others.

They seemed to confirm his mother's contention that his sire was a gentleman. No one seemed to know much about Eugene's father.

The boy had lived alone with his mother for twenty years in a cabin on the bay. A month back she had died.

But Eugene and Pacifique and Delphine and the rest were only the advance guard.

Others came later in twos and threes and fours—until more than thirty were there, laughing, singing, dancing, and drinking.

Some drew off into little knots to discuss important matters. Were the muskrats likely to be plentiful; was any one west of Vienna buying marsh hay?

The price of twine had gone up—and fishing so poor, too! The Laroques had a new baby, and perhaps Marcel would work now, or they would find themselves in the poorhouse. They mentioned Placide briefly, and wondered much about him.

X

THROUGH it all Toinette Chevalier moved, neither too gay nor too sad, meeting Placide Labadee's eyes from time to time, and drawing courage from him.

Her grandfather was in a jovial mood. She thought he might be watching her, and she turned on him, without warning, a dozen times, but always his attention appeared to be otherwise engaged.

The feeling that she was being watched would not down, however, and she let her eyes wander around the room until they finally met Amador, the fiddler. Without quite understanding why, she looked away.

She asked herself what she had to fear from him. Surely there was nothing—and yet his glance had been too searching, too tense.

He was well along in drink, but he kept perfect time with a heavy foot to his own music, and fairly strained his lungs as he called off the figures of the dance. Toinette wondered if he might be playing a game; pretending to be fuddled when he was not.

Placide danced off with her in his turn. He saw the flash of anxiety on her face, and his arm tightened about her.

"Soon, now," he whispered. "Don't worry."

"It's Amador," she breathed. "He suspects us!"

"Amador?" There was contempt in Placide's tone. "He had his chance—and he made a great mistake! Leave him to me, Toinette. Dance with Eli next, and do what he says."

He laughed uproariously, then, as though the girl had said something highly amusing.

It was good acting, but the tightening of Amador's lips told Toinette that he was not deceived.

Through the haze of tobacco smoke she

caught a glimpse of old Eli, seated at the table, a glass in his hand, and Julie Picard on his knee. There was nothing about his demeanor to suggest that the next few minutes would find him playing with death.

When Amador tapped bow against fiddle for the next dance to begin, it was Eli who bore Toinette off, after routing four protesting rivals for the girl's favor.

The huge old man brought to the dance the same tremendous energy which he put into his work as mate of the *Héloise*. His movements were elephantine, but he invested them with rhythm of a sort.

Toinette was swept along as a surging tide carries a cork. When the music quickened, Eli whirled her so swiftly that her feet left the floor.

Grandfather Chevalier laughed with the others at his antics, while the girl clung to him like a frightened bird.

Other couples gave them a wide berth, or were shouldered out of the way. When they passed the door they were so close they could have touched it. The next time around Eli steered a course some feet away.

"Amador is watching us," he cautioned.

Toinette sensed that Eli was trying to disarm Amador, to make their nearness to the door seem of no consequence as he edged her toward it or drew away. Was the fiddler, beneath his inscrutable mask, as keenly alive as she to what the ensuing minutes meant?

"The next time," Eli whispered, "we go. Jules and Victor are outside. Placide is near the kitchen door. He will slip out when we make the turn."

Toinette's face whitened.

"But Amador—he knows," she repeated, nervously.

"Of course, but he has waited too long," the mate rejoined.

Much too quickly for Toinette did they pass the fiddler's perch and make the turn that led toward the door. Far across the room she caught a glimpse of Placide, his eyes alert and confident.

The door must be near! Had she heard voices outside?

Eli was listening, too. Surely, Jules and Victor would not speak at such a desperate moment.

But the next moment Toinette recognized the voices as those of newcomers, and she could not hold back a little breathless gasp. Eli's mouth set in a hard line.

Already, in fancy, she could feel him leaping toward the door, dragging her after him; hear Amador's warning cry, and see the pack rushing at them. Another step would seal their fate.

And then the door opened—angrily, as though it had caught the raging pulse of the hand that flung it back. Sam Drouillard, white with snow, stalked into the cabin. A step behind him came Xavier, his son.

"Eli!" Toinette moaned, as she clutched him for support.

He had recognized the Drouillards, and as he tightened his arm around the girl, he turned so that his back was to them.

Toinette could think of nothing but that they had been trapped, their plan discovered, and that the Drouillards stood there to bar the way.

"Don't lose heart," Eli muttered. "The Drouillards will not stop us."

"We shall never go now," she replied hopelessly, thinking not only of the Drouillards and her grandfather, but of the storm, which rocked the cabin.

"No?" Eli queried scornfully. "I tell you we shall go!"

XI

XAVIER DROUILLARD and his father did not pause to slap the snow from their shoulders. Urgency was in their wind-whipped appearance, their bloodshot eyes, and tusk-like icicles that drooped from the older man's mustache. The Drouillards were visibly fearful lest they had come too late.

The crowd did not fall back before them, although the father glared about him. Amador started to lay aside his fiddle, but protesting cries came from a score of dancers.

The Drouillards were aware of the hostile glances, but they were used to hostility. Pacifique and most of the others from the bay were in debt to Drouillard.

Xavier's father knew that this antagonism was no more than a man in his position must expect. It mattered little to him.

Grandfather Chevalier called out a greeting from the far end of the room, and started forward through the whirling dancers. They buffeted him deliberately, he suspected, as if to show the unimportance they attached to Sam Drouillard's presence among them.

Mr. Drouillard caught sight of Grand-

father Chevalier, and waved a hand to him. Then he glanced about for Toinette.

Xavier was of the same mind. Not a tall youth, he stretched his thin neck until he was able to look over his father's shoulder at the dancers.

Eli had circled about him twice already, his great bulk a shield for the girl. Then Xavier stepped forward without warning, and saw Toinette. His eyes bulged behind their glasses.

A dozen times and more, on the way to the bay, he had told his father they would not find her there. Now he dared to smile at her, and openly pointed her out to his father.

"So there you are!" Mr. Drouillard exclaimed, shaking a reproving finger at the girl. "I wondered where you were all the time, Toinon."

Toinette did not answer, but he laughed heartily. He had scoffed at his son's warning that they would find Toinette gone with Captain Labadee. When they had pulled up their team at the washed-out bridge over Sulphur Creek, Xavier had declared it was Placide's work—to keep them from reaching the bay in time.

Mr. Drouillard now rushed toward Grandfather Chevalier, shaking a fist in mock anger.

"Joe, a man needs a boat to get here to-night!" he cried. "My horses can't walk on the water!"

"That's not my bridge!" Chevalier returned in the same rallying spirit. "Let your team swim!"

They shook hands, and Mr. Drouillard pushed his son forward.

"So that's you, Xavier!" Grandfather Chevalier said. He stepped back and ran his eyes over the boy. "All you need now is a mustache, and you'll be a man. Those pills you've been making must be pretty good. But I guess you don't want to talk about medicine to-night, eh?"

The old man grinned knowingly, and looked around the room. Not seeing his granddaughter, he called out: "Toinette! Toinette!"

The music stopped with a crash, and Amador's fiddle clattered to the floor. All turned toward the fiddler's perch in time to see him spring up with a rifle in his hands.

Amador fired almost instantly, leaped down, rushed to the door, and tugged at it savagely.

"They're gone!" he shouted. "They've got Toinette! Help me to open the door!"

Grandfather Chevalier's glance darted around the room. Here were some of Placide's men, taking no part in the turmoil. A half dozen other guests were trying to force the door.

"They've put a bar through the latch guard!" Pacifique roared.

The Drouillards were speechless. The smell of gunpowder seemed to sicken Xavier, who was staring fixedly at the smoke curling lazily about the lamps.

"The kitchen door!" some one cried. Then the crowd raced across the room toward it, Amador leading.

Cleophas Recor, whom Placide Labadee had called slow-witted, was standing close to the door. As Amador rushed past, he put out his foot and tripped him, and those immediately behind the fiddler went down also.

Cleophas, too, fell among them, but he shouted with a will:

"Hurry—or we'll be too late!"

Grandfather Chevalier had by now shaken off the trance that gripped him. The Drouillards found their tongues. Soon the whole crowd was pouring through the kitchen.

"The boats!" old Drouillard cried.

The boats were there, many of them—but the oars were not. Vainly they searched in the snow for them.

Sam Drouillard vehemently ordered everybody to do something—anything. He thundered, as they shrugged their shoulders helplessly:

"Are you going to let them get away? Man a boat! They're only a hundred yards out. Don't you see them there?"

Drouillard pointed to a rolling smudge, visible only at intervals against the whiteness of the towering waves.

Grandfather Chevalier came running down the beach, an old fowling piece in his hands.

"They're gone!" old Sam exclaimed, accusingly.

Chevalier elbowed him out of the way, in such a rage that he would have turned the gun on his ally for another word. He aimed at the tossing craft, and fired time after time until his shells were gone.

The cries of the crowd had vainly told him that he was wasting his powder, that the small boat was out of range. He tossed the shotgun away at last, and, evidently

believing his voice could carry authority, he shouted threats at Toinette and Labadee. He called upon God for vengeance.

Cleophas tried to calm him, but he flung the young blacksmith off and strode waist deep into the water to shake his fists in the direction of the Héloïse. Then he cursed his granddaughter, and called upon the world to witness that she should never cross his door again.

Flygette La Plante, matching the old man's blasphemies word for word, finally got him back upon the beach.

"Don't fret yourself, Joe," he said. "They haven't got away yet. There are only four of them—Victor, Jules, Eli, and Placide. The rest are here. Four men can't take that boat out. We'll see them piled up on the beach before the night's over."

"They're putting up a jib," Eugene Malby announced. "It's all the sail they need. They'll get away."

"In this gale? They'll never clear the point!" La Plante declared.

"It's well under water, Flygette," Eugene retorted. "Labadee will take his boat right over it!"

"*Mon Jee!*" Flygette exclaimed. "That's right! I crossed the point myself last spring during the high water."

"Yes, but the Héloïse is no pond boat," Remy Payette remarked bitterly. He had sailed with Placide for three years, and, in common with others of the crew who had been set ashore far from their Canadian homes, was in a savage temper. "Four men will not go far in such rough weather—and who can steer a course in a blinding snowstorm?"

"They have a chance," Eugene muttered. "I wish them luck."

"So do I," Flygette agreed cautiously, after a hurried glance about to see who might be listening. "Toinette wanted to go. All this talk of stealing her is rubbish. If she loves him, that's enough. He'll make her a better husband than Xavier."

A tremendous wave broke on the beach and forced them back.

"Placide is not the marrying kind," Remy Payette said, and laughed contemptuously. "Toinette is not the first woman he has run off with. He never married the others—and he will not marry her."

"And yet I think he will," Eugene Malby asserted earnestly. His thin face was blue and pinched with the cold.

"If he doesn't, he'd better not come back here!" Flygette announced savagely.

"I tell you, Toinette is just another woman to him," Payette insisted. "Look at the fools now! They'll be on the beach in another minute."

It was apparent that the Héloïse had lifted her anchor, and sea and gale were carrying her inshore rapidly.

Cleophas came up to Eugene. "My God!" he groaned. "They can't turn her. The worst nor'easter in ten years."

The others saw this, too. A cry ran up and down the beach, and the crowd was suddenly still, tense, and expectant, believing the end was only a matter of minutes.

As they waited, the sharp rattling of tackle blocks reached their ears. This was followed at once by the pistol-like reports of ropes and stays going taut.

They knew what was happening, and could almost feel the tremors that passed over the Héloïse. Unconsciously they arose on their toes, even as the schooner was rising and poising in her readiness to leap away before the first direct onslaught of the wind.

It struck the next instant. The canvas flatted out before it with a noise like the popping of a colossal paper bag.

"They've got the wind!" Cleophas cried, his tone betraying a great relief.

Grandfather Chevalier had not heard. His eyes were on the Héloïse. He shook his fists again as he saw her draw away.

"Stop!" he shouted madly. "I forbid you to go, Toinette!"

The schooner was a stout craft, and she had the bit in her teeth. In less than a minute she had doubled the distance between herself and the shore.

"They're going!" the grandfather shouted. "Give me that rifle, Amador!"

Amador shook his head and put the long range weapon behind him.

"No, Joe," he protested. "It's too late for that. I warned you, but you were stubborn. If I had had my way, I wouldn't have missed him. It's no use wasting your breath, Joe; you can't stop them now. Toinette is gone!"

XII

PLACIDE LABADEE held Toinette Chevalier in his arms for a brief embrace when they gained the cabin of the Héloïse. Although his eyes warmed as he smiled at her, it was only a gesture.

For the moment, his thoughts were not of her; she was aboard his boat, as he had planned—that was enough. Only the weather could defeat him now, and it was this that engaged his attention.

When once he had the Héloïse out of danger he could turn to Toinette. He could wait, and there was a strange pleasure in being forced to bide his time.

It did not occur to him that there could be any question about her wishes—she was his. He realized the peril of the storm, and what he had risked in taking her as he had; but he felt that no price he might have to pay could be too high.

He had not dreamed of attempting to cross the lake this night. He was a master sailor, and he knew that such an effort could end only in disaster. The nor'easter would stiffen hourly, until at daybreak no boat could live in it.

All day long he had known it would blow heavily before evening. He had made his plans accordingly, and the Canadian shore had had no place in them.

Anything he had said to the contrary had been fiction, invented for Toinette's ears. Her consent would be more readily gained if the way to the priest appeared direct and certain.

Before he had gone ashore he had determined to take advantage of the high water on Bay Pointe. Once across the point, he intended running before the wind.

The wide mouth of Ten-Mile Creek would be before him, and with luck he would be able to slip inside without mishap. When he had passed Guard Island, or the farther Odeon Island, he would bring the Héloïse about.

In the lee, he would find a safe anchorage. There he would stay and ride out the storm.

Eli had agreed with his captain on this course as practicable. Many times in the hours ashore Labadee had weighed the chances, making greater and greater allowances for rising sea and freshening wind, and his confidence had not been shaken.

But the wind had become a gale, and the night had grown thicker than Placide expected. It had taken every ounce of their man power to reach the schooner in the small boat.

A tremendous sea was running now. The deck of the Héloïse was awash every other second; every third or fourth wave raked her from stem to stern.

Since coming aboard, Eli and Labadee had not exchanged a word, but the master sensed the mate's uneasiness. Eli was not easily discouraged by wind or weather, but Placide now found himself questioning the wisdom of what he proposed doing.

Down below, the sound of straining timbers filled the air. Toinette's eyes were never still, roving about fearfully in an unseeing search. By the light of the swaying lantern, Placide saw the whiteness of her face.

"Don't be afraid," he chided, as he grinned at her. "The Héloïse has been through worse than this."

"But I *am* afraid, Placide," the girl cried, clutching his arm desperately. "We shouldn't have come. No vessel can live in this storm. Do you know what you are doing, Placide? If we don't go down, we'll be swept ashore. You *know* it, Placide!"

He was ready with a denial, but at this moment a mountainous wave struck the schooner with such violence that the words were brushed from his lips as he struggled to keep his balance. A growing doubt that he could keep the schooner offshore, when they slipped anchor, became formidable.

Suddenly, the enterprise appeared to him little short of madness. As for running the creek— He groaned unconsciously at the thought, and his eyes avoided Toinette's, as though fearful that he should reveal how thin was the armor of his will.

The night was as black as pitch; there was not a single landmark to help a mariner to hold a course. The islands themselves, beyond a doubt, were under water.

In comparative size, they were only muskrat houses in the vastness of a great marsh, dignified on the maps by the name of North Maumee Bay. It was shallow in spots, and fit only for punt or rowboat; deep in certain channels, but assuredly not a safe place for a vessel the size of the Héloïse.

Captain Labadee had known all this. To miss the channel between Guard Island and Odeon Island was to find oneself adrift in an uncharted flood.

The water must have backed up for miles, and there would be enough to float the Héloïse. But she would be a prey to the full sweep of the gale, and it would be impossible to hold her with anchors in the soft morass.

She would drift until she fetched up in Halfway Creek, or one of the many sloughs

which indented the shore. The schooner would be safe enough there for a few hours.

Then the water would recede almost as quickly as it had risen, and the Héloïse would be trapped. She would stay there to rot, or be chopped up for firewood.

Placide Labadee's lips were dry as he turned to the door. He cursed himself mentally as a fool for not having earlier recognized the hopelessness of his plan.

From across the riotous water, rising above the screaming of the gale, the banging of tackle blocks, and the unearthly din below deck, there came the long, quavering, melancholy call of the loon.

Captain Labadee's blood chilled. There was a premonition of evil in the bird's voice.

Suddenly, Placide realized there was yet time for him to change his course. He knew what to expect outside, in the full sweep of the sea, but he would have the lake before him—and a stout vessel always has a chance to live if you can keep water enough under her.

He was the master, but the other men aboard had volunteered for this mad venture, and they would have a vote in what was done. Jules would agree to anything he proposed. Victor could be convinced. But Eli—

Determined to have the question settled at once, Labadee flung back the door to step into the companionway.

Toinette had been watching him intently, and his anxiety had been communicated to her. A cry, blended of fear and amazement that he could leave her without a word, escaped her lips.

"No, Placide!" she pleaded, holding to him with all her strength. "Don't leave me here alone. I'm afraid! Let me go on deck with you."

Her eyes were wild, and there was a deathly pallor on her face. Placide's mouth tightened as he stared at her. She read the changing expression in his eyes for what it was—an ill-concealed impatience.

"You stay below, Toinette!" he ordered sharply, pushing her back. "You are safe here. Do you want to be washed away?"

There was wisdom in his words, but the girl was too distraught to realize it. "No, no, Placide!" she screamed. "I can't stand it down here; I can't breathe!"

He shook her off roughly.

"You'll do as I say," he announced grimly. "I know what is best for you."

"Placide — please — please!" Toinette begged, tears choking her.

She reached out for him again. His hands closed over hers, and something in his touch froze her heart. The tenderness she had come to expect, even in the fierceness of his embraces, was gone.

He pushed her staggering back halfway across the cabin. The door was slammed shut.

She caught herself from falling. Lurching forward, then, on the tiptilted floor, she threw herself at the door. An unreasoning fear swept over her, and she insanely beat on the panels with her hands.

She knew what had happened before she tried the doorknob. The door was locked. Placide had gone—and she was a prisoner.

XIII

TOINETTE heard Placide run up on deck. The fact of his desertion stunned her. She cowered against the door, not knowing what to do.

A great wave struck the cabin and threw her down. Eyes closed, she picked herself up and waited for death as the torrent thundered over the roof.

But, as time went on, and the Héloïse stood up under the blows of wind and sea, courage of a sort came back to the girl. Yet, every time a furious wave broke over the cabin, she shrank in fear. The feeling that she was trapped would not down.

For the first time the cabin itself now came under her inspection. It appeared small, bare, uncomfortable, and dirty.

Scars in the paint revealed various underlying colors, testimony of the different tastes of the schooner's successive owners. Hung on a row of nails were the clothes of a seafaring man. A battered accordion was stowed in the opposite corner.

Small pictures of women in undress or tights; dancers, actresses—the whole assortment of photographic premiums given away with the cigarettes of that day—were tacked on a wall.

She recoiled before these pictured charms from a world of which she knew nothing. But knowledge of them was not necessary; a child would have sensed their boldness.

Toinette's own environment was crude, but she had been taught that there was heinousness in naked flesh wantonly revealed. To her people, it was a shame but

once removed from lust—the sin incarnate which God could not forgive.

She thought nothing of going about barelegged to her dimpled knees. But these pictured women had the nakedness of the voluptuary, the fallen.

Toinette wondered how these women concerned Placide. However remote the connection, it took him out of her world into theirs—a realm of sin, of silk, of ease, of all to which she was a stranger.

She had looked on Placide as she did on Cleophas and the other men she knew so well, ignoring the fact that Placide alone had stirred hidden fires in her. Now she realized how little she really knew him.

If he found these brazen women attractive, why did he come seeking her? Was it because he looked on a girl of the marshlands as he must look on them?

A fear came to her that quite transcended the feeling of danger that the storm had wrought.

Her eyes strayed to the window a foot above her head, and there they met a pictured face that drew a gasp of dismay from her. It was a photograph, larger than the others, and scrawled across the bottom of it were the words:

To Placide, with love.

It was a young and pretty face, a trifle hard about the mouth. The bosom was partly bare.

Toinette's fists clenched as she stood, swaying with the reeling vessel, before the picture. Red spots flamed in her cheeks.

Feature by feature, she studied the face, and always her gaze returned to the woman's eyes. In them was the unmistakable light of the huntress, of the woman who fools no man.

Obscene verses on a post card, tacked to the wall just below the photograph, next drilled their way into her consciousness and nauseated her. Child though she was, she realized that this cabin's adornments were revelatory; she was seeing Placide Labadee as he was.

It had been for this that Cleophas Re-cor, and her grandfather, and old Amador, and the others had argued against the Canadian. Of this, she was certain.

She hated this pictured face before her—and she hated Placide. The storm no longer existed in her thoughts.

She knew she would not go on with him; she would go ashore, if she had to swim

even a wilder sea than was raging. She caught up an overturned chair and attacked the door so savagely that the chair fell to pieces.

Thinking of nothing but to be free, she climbed to one of the berths and tried to open the window. She struggled with it several minutes before she saw that it was locked.

The boat was rocking so violently that it was almost impossible for her to maintain her perch. Then a mighty wave struck the Héloïse, and Toinette pitched to the floor.

The force of her fall was so stunning that some time passed before she sat up. A leg of the chair which she had demolished rolled to and fro across the floor, and beat a slow measure on her thigh. She picked it up, and at length realized that here was an excellent weapon to break the window.

The first blow broke the glass. The rush of cold air which struck her had a steadying effect.

By the greatest of efforts, she clung to her position until she removed the shattered pane, piece by piece. She did not know just how she was to crawl through and out upon the deck.

She got an arm through first, and her head followed. Then, by a seeming miracle, the other arm and her shoulders passed, too.

The thunder of cascading water warned her that a wave was sweeping the boat, but she was held helplessly. She closed her eyes to the deluge.

A second later, half drowned, she drew air into her lungs again. She knew that a minute or two would bring another wall of water down upon her.

The girl thought of wriggling back into the cabin, but she found her body too tightly wedged in the opening. To go ahead appeared equally impossible, but the knowledge that each passing second lessened her chance of life spurred her on to desperate effort.

She twisted madly. The copper sash cut through her clothes and stung her flesh.

Toinette had almost despaired of getting free of the trap into which she had blundered, when her wildly thrashing hands caught a loose end of rope swinging back and forth across the deck. It gave her the purchase she had lacked before.

The sting of the knifelike edge of the sash began to travel down her body. She endured this stoically, knowing that it spelled progress.

The girl rested for a moment, and summoned courage for a final effort. It was not all needed, for she slipped through so easily that she sprawled upon the deck.

Her ears, rather than her eyes, warned her that a great sea was swooping toward her. She got to her feet and leaped for the mainmast in time to twine her legs and arms around the halyards before the foaming water struck her.

She watched it sweep by, its thousand hands plucking at her. Cheated of its prey, a cascade poured through the cabin window with a sinister gurgle.

Placide and the others were up forward. The sailors were Labadee's employees, but they could not refuse to put her ashore.

Of them all, Eli, the mate, would be the one sure to take her part. Twenty years he had been coming to her grandfather's cabin. She thought gratefully of that as she ran forward.

XIV

TOINETTE saw them before they saw her—four white figures huddled about the knightheads, a flickering lantern laying grotesque shadows on their faces. Eli and Labadee were shouting at each other.

Placide's back was toward her, but she could sense the rage which gripped him. Eli's eyes were sullen and unafraid as he faced his skipper.

"You're thinking of your boat, and not of us!" the old mate cried. "I'm not afraid of any man or storm, but I don't believe the Héloïse can face this sea. If we run inside, we've got a chance. That's what we agreed on when we offered to come. Only a fool would talk of crossing the lake to-night!"

"Fool, eh?" Labadee said scathingly. "I tell you it is the fool who doesn't dare to change his mind. I had no thought of crossing to-night; the three of you know that. That yarn was for Toinette! But did any of us believe this storm would be so bad? No! We laughed at it. Well, we don't laugh now. I'm not thinking of reaching Canada. We can stand outside for ten miles or so and point for Toledo. We'll be all right if we reach the Maumee."

A warning cry from Victor sent them running to safety. Toinette interpreted the cry correctly, but for the moment she was helpless.

Placide's admission that he had lied to her, that the lives of all were in danger, had

a numbing effect on her limbs. The second which she wasted left her at the mercy of the onswEEPing wave. She screamed.

Victor was nearest. He lunged for her without a moment's hesitation, lost his footing, struggled violently to catch himself, and then rolled across the deck.

Placide had turned, too. He shouted and leaped for her. His arm circled her waist, and swept her on with him in his rush.

Eli groaned so loudly that Toinette heard him above the roaring of the water. Plainly enough, his voice said he believed them lost.

Placide knew what he was about; the starboard shrouds were just ahead of him. He threw out an arm, caught the topmast backstays, swung in under them to the shrouds, and scrambled up the ratlines with the girl as the roaring sea swept past.

Eli shouted encouragingly. For an instant Toinette had a glimpse of Victor.

The surging wave had picked him up and bore him along as if he were a cork. His mouth was open wide, and his eyes were popping from their sockets. Death was claiming him—and he knew he was lost.

The agony written on that white face strangled Toinette. She looked again, and Victor was gone.

Placide tossed her to Eli, snatched the lantern from him, and ran aft. He was back presently, his jaw set, his eyes cold. "Victor is gone," he said simply.

Eli nodded. Jules turned away without a word, and crossed himself. He had heard the loon's mournful call—and knew that it was for one of them that the grim har-binger of death and disaster had spoken.

Toinette was crying hysterically, and when Eli spoke to her she did not hear him. Placide stepped toward her, but she did not see him.

Labadee seemed to realize only now that the girl was here on deck where he had forbidden her to come. He reached out and caught her roughly, but she instinctively whirled and clung to Eli. The mate did not repulse her.

This double defiance infuriated Placide. "She's mine!" he roared. "She'll do what I say—and so will you, Eli. I know what is best. You saw what happened to Victor— Good God! But for me it would have been her, too! If you had done as I said, Victor would be here now."

"One of us had to go," Jules announced bitterly.

"So you believe that fairy tale, Jules?" Labadee demanded, laughingly. "Are you afraid? And you, Eli; what's come over you? I've heard the loon before; I'm not afraid!"

His voice carried conviction, but he wondered at his own temerity, for in his heart he bowed to every superstition of the sea. Yet he had done things with a flourish so long that he easily slipped back into his old manner. He drew Toinette away from Eli so that she faced him.

"My lady!" he exclaimed, mockingly. "You defy me, too. I leave you locked below, and yet you are here. How do you explain it?"

Toinette winced as his fingers sunk into her arm.

"Don't, Placide!" she cried. "You hurt me. I broke the window and crawled through. I want to go ashore. Oh, don't hurt me—Eli! Save me!"

The mate brought his fist down on Placide's arm and knocked it away. "That's enough," he growled. "You must not hurt her."

"Don't raise your hand to me again, Eli," Labadee said, menacingly. "You need me, and I need you this night. You'll take orders from me. As for going ashore with Toinette—You are not mad enough to think I'll consent to that?"

"I am not a fool," Eli replied, and added to Toinette: "It's death to try it. Placide is right; you must go with us now. You wanted to come; you love him."

"No, Eli, no! I've changed my mind. Take me home!"

Eli was not unmoved. Her declaration that she no longer loved Placide surprised him, but he surmised that this change of heart was due to misgiving about the man's promises. He knew Labadee had no intention of marrying her.

Ordinarily, the mate would have considered the situation no affair of his. And never for a moment did it occur to him that the girl's innocence, or his fondness for her, had ought to do with a sudden fierce determination that Placide Labadee should marry her as he had promised.

There came to old Eli memories of Toinette as a black-haired babe, as a small girl in starched linen, as a hoydenish twelve-year-old, as a demure maiden of fifteen—and here she was a vivid, robust young

woman of twenty. She needed his aid now; never had she been in so great a danger.

"Don't worry, Toinette!" he exclaimed, suddenly. "Placide will marry you! I promise you that!"

Labadee laughed and shook his head quite as one does with a headstrong child. Toinette's changing expression held Eli's entire attention.

"But, Eli," she said, "I do not want him to marry me. I just want to—"

"You don't?" he interrupted, his tone sharply incredulous. "You knew this was only a lark, then?" He felt himself fooled, baffled.

Toinette met his angry stare bravely.

"I—I didn't know, Eli; but—but I know now," she faltered.

"You didn't know, eh?" Placide laughed tauntingly, his white teeth gleaming. "You are too innocent, my lady!"

His manner changed then. "But you know now, Toinette! You are going with us, and we are going at once."

Before Eli could prevent him, he plucked the girl up from the swaying deck and kissed her. Toinette clawed at his face, but he did not mind.

Eli lunged at him angrily, but Jules leaped forward, too. He caught the mate around the middle and swung him back.

"We've had enough of this," the sailor shouted. "I've no mind to join Victor! You'll do as Placide commands. To-morrow you can have your say, Eli. You're as bad as the girl; if you had anything to say, you should have said it while we were ashore."

"The two of you are against me, eh?" Eli remarked grimly. "Very well; I'll wait. To-morrow will do for me."

"To-morrow it is," Placide agreed.

"But you keep your hands off her until then," Eli warned him.

"You wring no promise out of me," Labadee flared back. "We'll be lucky to be alive to-morrow. But this isn't the first tight squeeze we've been in together. We can make it, if you'll lend a hand."

Toinette was fighting valiantly to get free of him, but he had swept her off her feet, and held her with one arm so tightly that her squirming was of no avail. Her struggling, added to the violent pitching of the schooner, made it difficult for him to keep his footing, but he faced Eli truculently, awaiting his answer.

The mate yielded to the habit of long days of service afloat. "I'll go," he said.

Placide believed he had cowed Eli, and his old arrogance returned to him.

He snatched the lantern from Eli, and, with Toinette in his arms, ran aft. The girl pleaded and stormed at him, but he was deaf to her entreaties.

He opened the cabin door to find the place waist deep in water. Pulling the blankets from his berth, he wrapped them around Toinette and carried her swiftly to the wheelhouse.

XV

THE wheelhouse on the *Héloise* was nothing more than a crude three-sided shelter built over the wheel and compass box. As soon as they reached it, Placide caught up a length of rope and fastened it around Toinette's waist; and then, to her amazement, passed it around his own body, and next lashed it fast to the wheel.

He threw himself back, carrying Toinette with him, as he tested the rope. It held.

He did not speak to her. He lifted the lantern, and swung it back and forth.

It seemed to Toinette that the timbers beneath her feet winced. Almost immediately the vessel began to roll more violently in the trough of the sea.

Placide continued to throw down the wheel, but the vessel would not pay off. He opened his mouth to bawl out an order to Jules, but before he could speak the jib filled.

The *Héloise* lifted as though she would leave the water. Every line and stay sung.

She was taking the seas broadside now. One struck her and helped to keel her over. She came back again slowly, her sticks in place, her rigging as right as ever. She began to gather speed.

Placide spoke to her, and petted the wheel as fondly as though he were stroking a woman's cheek.

Toinette did not think it strange. The blood of her wild, fierce, combat-loving ancestors began to assert itself. Folklore, environment, every fashioning influence she had ever known, had made a virtue of overcoming the elements. She found herself thrilling to the moment.

She glanced at Placide. His mittens and coat did not conceal the strength of his hands, the bulging of his fine muscles. He had fastened the lantern to the compass

box, and whenever he bent over she could catch a glimpse of his face, his eyes gleaming and his nostrils lifting as though he would smell out the weather ahead of him.

This was the Placide she had visioned, and loved. She found something magnificent about him as he stood there, defiant and self-confident, swaying with the roll of the vessel, and apparently unmindful of the bundled figure of the girl that he tugged to and fro with him.

It was this viking quality which had first won her; and she was not insensible to it now. That he was oblivious to her presence mattered not to her; women of her race had always been ignored at such moments by their men.

Toinette began to glory in Placide's crusade against the elements. The emotional appeal of the circumstances was irresistible. It carried her away; and yet she told herself she loved him no more—but she no longer hated him.

Placide often posed, but he was not playing now. He was living as he had always wanted to live—at grips with sea and storm; defying them, daring them to do their worst.

He no longer slapped the wet snow from his face; its icy kiss could not annoy him. Toinette was there beside him; she was the prize for which he played, but it was the game, rather than the reward, that was temporarily making a madman of him.

Already they were five miles offshore. In a half hour they would have quartered enough. Then, with the wind behind them, they would romp into Toledo.

The *Héloise* was as good as ever; what could stop them now? Captain Labadee laughed triumphantly, and began to sing until his voice boomed above the storm.

His choice, "*Voici le Rédempteur*"—a chanson seldom heard except on Christmas Eve—was ghastly, their situation considered, for he made of it a wild, roistering chantey that mocked the Christ whom it was intended to acclaim.

Toinette stared at him tremblingly, wondering if he were really mad. She glanced heavenward as Placide sang on, as though she expected the hand of God to swoop down out of the black sky to smite him.

And now the maternal instinct awakened in her, and she pitied the man, and forgave him. As he roared his song, she prayed for him, humbly petitioning the Holy Mother to intercede, to save him, to soften

his heart that he might repent in his own way.

The snow and spray had soaked the blankets Labadee had wrapped around her, and turned them into a stiff and icy shroud. The cold ate into her until her arms and legs no longer obeyed her will. But through it all her lips continued to move in supplication for Placide's salvation.

Eventually, he stopped singing and addressed the girl.

"Are you all right, Toinette?" he mumbled, his voice as thick as a drunken man's.

She nodded slowly, searching his eyes.

"That Victor was a terrible fool, getting washed away like that!" Labadee chuckled insanely. "I wonder what Delphine Rou-bideaux will say?"

He fumbled about his pockets for his flask, and held it to his lips until it was half emptied. He passed it to her then.

"Drink all that, Toinette," he ordered.

"It will make you warm. We're going to be wet when we get the wind behind us."

XVI

THE brandy did not make Toinette drowsy, as it usually did. Several times she started to speak to Placide, but she failed to find words to voice the questions she would ask.

Her eyes did not leave him, though, and it was as if she would make known with them what she wanted to say. How far had they come? How much longer would they have to face that terrible wind?

Placide at length turned a questioning look at her. But it was to see if there was something she could clutch; the walls of the wheelhouse were bare.

"Grab my leg!" he shouted. "I'm going to send her into the wind. We're going to run for it, now!"

She obeyed without question. She saw the wheel spin, and heard Labadee grunt as he fought to keep it from going all the way down. The wind fairly picked up the Héloïse and threw her ahead.

Placide yelled crazily:

"We're going to fly, Toinette! I told you she was a stout boat."

The girl felt the vessel quiver, and wondered how long it would be before they found themselves struggling in the ravenous water. The gale bore the schooner along, but the waves raced past her, hung in mid-air, grew top-heavy, and fell upon her in a raging torrent.

Toinette began to count the passing of seconds—thirty, and then the deluge! The waves tore at the flimsy wheelhouse, wrenched and battered it. She knew that wood and nails could not withstand such assaults forever.

Placide read her thought.

"She's stout, I tell you; as good as ever!" he shouted wildly.

A moment later the frail roof buckled and lifted. Unseen hands whipped it away as cleanly as if it had been sliced off with a giant knife.

Placide knew what was coming. He drew Toinette down beside the wheel.

The next wave that fell on them smashed the walls, splintering the tough planks and sucking the fragments along with it in its wild ride.

Fire burned alongside Toinette's head where a spike had passed. She put up a shaking hand, and brought it down wet to her mouth. Her lips told her it was blood.

"A nail," Labadee remarked, and then, to appear unmoved: "That's better, now; we can get a breath of air."

Toinette shook her head. So he was really mad! Death could not be far away.

Was she to die? She had seen death; she had been present when it had taken Suzanne Rivot, Cleophas's cousin.

Death meant candles, one at each end of the coffin; more candles in the white church at Vienna; Father Braire very solemn in his white robe; the gathering of friends one had not seen in months; hushed voices; living and eating in the kitchen.

For the dead, a last dressing in one's best clothes; a line or two in the newspaper at Monroe; and flowers—snowballs in early summer, marigolds and asters in the fall.

M. Grimaud, the undertaker, always drove over from Monroe, his black wagon either white with dust or covered with mud; his long green coat travel-stained, except in summer, when he wore a linen duster over it. He had soiled his white gloves at the grave when he came to bury Suzanne.

Toinette had washed them for him, and tried them on surreptitiously. She remembered that now; they were miles too large for her.

M. Grimaud would come for her—but perhaps there would be nothing to come for. And the notice in the paper—would Grandfather Chevalier forgive her and pay

for that? Cleophas would bring flowers; and Eugene Malby, of the sad eyes and long white fingers, might write some verses about her.

But the Héloïse did not go down. Indeed, she seemed to have caught the rhythm of the sea's tremendous agony.

Her speed had increased. Toinette now could count to forty-two in the intervals between the mountainous waves.

It was growing perceptibly colder; the snow was no longer wet as it struck her face. She put her hand to her head again; the wound was not bleeding so freely now.

The thought came to her that the Héloïse might make the Maumee safely. There was nothing in her way; she had a clear course.

There was Turtle Island, of course; a scant three acres of rocky beach. In its center was the bald white lighthouse, reaching high into the air.

Captain Haynes, the keeper, was a good man. He and his son, Carson, had rescued the crew of the freighter, Dean Richmond, when that vessel had gone down early this fall in a nor'easter. But navigation was closed for the winter, and the lighthouse was darkened.

All the Héloïse had to do was to hold together until they passed Presque Isle, at the mouth of the Maumee. It sounded simple enough, but a lie hid in the words.

Toinette knew they must be a long way offshore. She wondered how deep the water was beneath her. And yet, men drown in one fathom as easily as in twenty.

Eli was shouting. He was swinging a lantern frantically.

The girl shook her head as one does in throwing off the cobwebs of a dream. She grabbed Placide's arm savagely, but he threw her hand away. She could see him setting himself for something terrific.

Toinette wanted to cry out, but now was not the time for puny words. A giant had imposed an impassable barrier to all her small world:

The Héloïse stopped. All of her stopped—sticks, stays, hull—stopped in her tracks, whimpering, trembling; a tired horse at the end of its days.

Aloft, another giant brought down his fist. From wheel to knightheads, the Héloïse was swept clean. Masts, booms, canvas, rigging—all the gear that marks the difference between ship and hulk—had been torn away.

Only the sick, unconscious hulk was left, bleeding to death on the bosom of another wanderer of the watery lanes—the greasy, green, derelict shell of the Dean Richmond! Mortal hands would never unlock these two. The schooner rode up over the side of the freighter, her stern down, her bow up in the air.

Placide Labadee was slashing with his knife. Then he dragged Toinette with him up the hill of a deck. He cursed and he prayed, running the gamut of human emotions with two words—the name of the Son of God! Hatred, fear, supplication, agony, all were expressed.

A lantern and a man slithered down the wet deck from the starboard hawse hole. It was Eli. Jules followed him, garrulous and terribly excited. Curses flowed from his lips; yet he was not eloquent. They were vocal blows aimed at Captain Labadee's pride.

Placide held his head up to receive them, like a fighter who has drawn out his opponent and knows he has nothing further to fear. The young skipper knew that he had run down the floating wreck of the Dean Richmond, and that the Héloïse had a hole three feet wide in her starboard bow.

He could feel the vessel settling as the water poured into her. He knew it would not be long before the two hulks locked together, would roll over and plunge to the bottom.

Eli stood it much better than Jules. The mate had not said a word. He held his lantern up to Toinette's head, examining the wound.

Placide said to him: "How far off Turtle Island do you think we are?"

Eli shrugged his shoulders.

"You're the master," he replied, heavily.

"Your guess is as good as mine, Eli."

"The Dean Richmond is hull up, Labadee. She's been in the mud for two months. She may not have drifted far."

Placide grunted skeptically. "And she may have drifted ten miles. We'll put a boat over and chance the rest."

The manner in which the two vessels had piled up left a little space on the leeward side. It was a black hole, in which the water alternately lifted and fell a distance of twelve to fifteen feet, bubbling up and sucking down with a dreadful swish.

"We can't put a boat out," Jules declared, challengingly.

No one bothered to answer him. He had fetched a life-preserver, which he offered to Toinette.

Eli grabbed it and threw it overboard. Jules yelled angrily.

"She's better off without that damn thing to drag her down," Eli muttered, and Placide agreed.

They got the boat ready, then, stowed the oars, and beckoned to the girl. How deep that well of water looked! They put her in the boat, tied a length of rope around her waist, and fastened the other end through the gunwale.

"Lie down, Toinette; don't get up, no matter what happens," Placide warned. "We'll get her away as soon as she hits the water."

They began to lower the small boat, intent on letting her down when the water fell, and themselves being ready to jump aboard and push off when she came up. Jules and Eli were at the bow, Placide at the stern.

Down, down, down, Toinette felt the frail thing drop. It grew quiet there. Above her were the hiss and scream of the sea, the wrenching of timbers, the thunder of water, the shouting of men. But how dwarfed they were now!

A new sound had joined that ribald band. It was the sound of silence; and it was a dreadful sound. It hushed and mocked its fellows, for it was also the sound of death, the sound that stops the heart and reaches the soul.

Up the boat popped, then, riding that black geyser. A stretch of gunwale was torn away as the little craft rubbed shoulders with its ill-fated mother.

Placide was ready. He leaped, got aboard safely, and then turned to hold the boat away from the dripping hull that would crash it. He slipped, and went down between the two boats.

Toinette heard the bones in his leg crunch as the small boat struck the schooner. In some way she caught him, yanked at him, tugged, and pulled him in and down beside her.

The boat was dropping again. Unseen hands plucked her up and whirled her around. The stricken Héloïse was ten feet away.

Placide had dragged himself erect. He was at the oars.

He held the yawl's nose away from the wind. The ten feet became twenty.

"Eli! Jules!" the girl cried, frantically. "We can't leave them—no—no—Placide!"

Labadee did not have to answer. Eli's voice came down the wind to them, hoarse and heavy.

"Don't come back, you fool!" he yelled. "Pull on, Labadee! We'll be all right till daylight!"

Was that other sound Jules sobbing?

XVII

LIKE a wild swan, the yawl swooped down into abyss after abyss, gathered speed always, and swept valiantly up and over the black watery mountains which continually barred the way. Toinette, sprawled out on the bottom of the boat, could not see the towering walls about her, or glimpse the chutes down which they plunged, for it was darker than ever. But she knew without seeing; knew better, perhaps, than if she had seen.

Her wet clothes clung to her, cold and clammy. The spray turned the snow to slush in the bottom of the yawl, and it surged past her in a murky little flood, forward and aft in turn, as the boat plunged and lifted.

She wondered what God's purpose could be in keeping them afloat, in continuation of this awful agony. She was no longer hungry for life.

Toinette knew Placide was badly hurt. He must be in great pain to groan so mournfully. His voice was like a bell tolling the knell of their passing.

She realized that Eli and Jules were gone. First, Victor—now Eli and Jules. Three of them!

But for her, they would be dancing at Joe Chevalier's; gay, comfortably drunk, and with not a care in the whole world. She was to blame; she had let Placide do this thing.

Suddenly, she missed something. Placide was not moaning.

She put out her hand quickly, searching for his feet, afraid that he had slipped overboard. He was there. He said crossly:

"Lie down, Toinette!"

"Your leg, Placide?" she demanded.

"Doesn't hurt so much now," he answered gruffly.

She did not pursue the conversation. A long time later, distant booming, like, and yet unlike, the sounds about them, reached her ears. The sound grew.

It was the booming of surf! As she listened, half rising in her excitement, the boat lurched and shipped water.

She cried out, then, and clutched Labadee's feet. He did not speak.

Toinette shouted again, and, without waiting for him to reply, crawled back beside him, searching blindly for his face. His head was sagging. He still clutched the steering oar in his hands, but his arms were limp.

She got the oar away from him and put her strength on it. The yawl righted itself and sped on toward the ever louder surf.

She could not spare a hand to search for signs of life in him. He could not be dead; pain had mastered him, and he had slipped into unconsciousness. She could not have told from what her confidence sprang, but she was sure Placide lived.

The yawl plunged down the smooth side of a great wave and began to pitch violently. Toinette waited for the accustomed climb up the next wave. It did not come.

Water poured over her. The yawl was full to the gunwales. It staggered along drunkenly. The oar was torn out of her hands.

She caught Placide and held him, fearful lest he be washed away. It seemed that bow and stern were going in different directions at once, lifting, falling, lifting. It was not the plunging down into deep watery caverns, with the closely following sweep upward, that she had come to expect, but quick, mad descents, and even more sudden upward pitches.

Without warning, some titan of the sea caught the yawl and threw it—no other word could describe the act—thirty feet forward. Toinette caught her breath and clasped Placide tighter as the boat was thrown again. The yawl struck something solid this time, and the impact hurled them flat.

They were in the water, but here was bottom. Waist deep in the black flood, she stood and tugged at Placide.

The water was racing out now. She could feel it tugging against her limbs; could hear it sucking at the foundered yawl. The roar of the surf was like the measured beat of mighty hammers.

She braced herself, dug her feet into the sand, and hung on. She drew a grateful breath into her lungs as she felt the strength of the ebb lessen. What a load Placide was! *Drag! Drag!*

The next wave caught them and knocked her off her feet; but she held fast to Placide. Twenty feet they rode on the crest. Once more the ebb pulled at her, but she was half free of it, and it could not drag her back now.

Toinette knew what was coming, and was ready for it. *Slap! Slap!* Tiny blows were these in comparison—water flooding past them.

Soon Placide was lying on a rocky beach, his head in the girl's lap. The waves rolled up to them, whipping spume into her face as she sat there. She wanted to laugh at them, to taunt them, to scream insults at them.

She knew she must not tarry there; Placide's head hung so heavily. She must get him farther up the beach, and go in search of help. Somewhere within her she must find the reserve strength to do this.

Exhaling her breath like a laborer at a back-breaking task, she dragged him free of the water, and stood over him, swaying dizzily.

"Placide, do you hear me?" she questioned, and obtained no answer.

She turned away, and the curtain of snow closed about her as she wandered off. She traveled with the wind, because that way was easiest.

The rocky beach was left behind, and she came to level ground. She did not quicken her pace, because each successive step left her marveling that she had been able to take it.

Toinette knew the hopelessness of her task. Help, to be in time, had to come quickly, had to be near.

And yet she went on, bent over, doggedly, because it was in the bone and fiber of her to carry on the good fight. The floundering trail she left in the snow spoke eloquently of the price paid in exhaustion.

There was no encouraging light from farmhouse or shanty to beckon her on. A panicky thought came to her: how could she find Placide in this darkness?

Then Toinette became aware of her blood warming through her great exertions. Some of the stiffness left her body.

A few minutes later a huge shape loomed ahead of her. She put out her hands and ran them over it. It was a stone wall.

She followed it, and came to a window. She found herself at a corner, then, out of the wind. Ten feet more brought her to a door.

She banged on it heavily. All was still within. Several times she hammered it, without raising an answer.

There were no deserted houses in this lake country; some one must be there. The noise of the storm was great; perhaps they had not heard her. A window would serve her better than the door.

Continuing around the house, she saw something rising high into the air, and white even in the blackness of the night. She lifted her head to gauge it.

It was the lighthouse! They had been thrown ashore on deserted Turtle Island.

Toinette found a window, unlatched its board shutters, opened the unlocked window, and climbed in. This was the kitchen, and, after a long, fumbling search, she found matches.

Then she located a lamp. Oh, the blessedness of light when darkness has become terrifying!

There was a neat pile of wood behind the stove. She swiftly built a fire, searched for and discovered a lantern, and put a kettle of water on the stove.

In the bedroom she found an assortment of male attire. She caught up an armful and hurried to the kitchen, where she rapidly discarded her wet clothes and slipped into the strange garments.

The kitchen was getting warm. Her flesh twitched in automatic protest against leaving this haven for the cutting cold outside. Picking up the lantern, she unfastened the kitchen door and stoically stepped out into the snow and the wind.

Toinette tried to run her back trail, but the falling snow had obliterated it. She knew she had come with the wind, so back into it she must go.

She was stronger, now, and went plowing ahead with savage determination. She came to the beach at last.

Placide was not where she expected. Had the snow covered him? She searched with her lantern, but the white mantle hid only great boulders.

The girl feared she had come the wrong way, and was about to retrace her steps, when she heard her name called. A few yards away she found Placide, closer to the surf than she had estimated. He had not moved from the spot where she had left him.

She held the lantern up to his face. Gratitude was conquering pain in his blood-shot eyes.

"You are better, Placide?" she asked, anxiously.

"Yes, Toinette. Did I faint?"

She nodded, and put her hand on his forehead. It was warm from the agony he suffered.

"You can't walk, can you, Placide?"

The lantern fascinated him, and he did not reply.

"Those clothes, and that lantern, Toinette. Turtle Island, I guess. No one here."

"I opened the kitchen window. I made a fire before I started back. If you could only walk; I can't carry you, Placide."

"Help me up. If I get my arm around your neck, maybe we can make it. My leg must be broken in two or three places."

Every move wrung a cry of pain from him, but he urged her on. When she got him erect, it seemed that his weight must drag her to her knees.

Yet, a step at a time, they left the beach behind them. Toinette was just beginning to hope that she might succeed in getting him to the house when the lantern fell and went out. She could not light it again.

"Let it go," Placide muttered shakily. "The house cannot be far away. Can you see it?"

"We'll be able to touch it, Placide, before we see it."

She had forgotten about the light which now beamed from the windows. Placide saw it first.

"There it is!" he cried. "We won't stop till we reach it. What! Are you going to fall, Toinette?"

She caught herself, and swayed crazily for a second.

"I'm all right," she said wearily. "We'll go on."

They reached the house, and here Toinette stumbled in through the doorway and fell heavily. Placide cursed in agony as he clung to the door.

Toinette was not hurt. She sat up, rubbing her shoulder. Placide forced a smile to his lips.

"That's a good girl, Toinette," he said. "You should have been a man."

The kettle was singing. She made tea, and Placide drank it greedily.

Then she cut away the boot from his injured leg. She could feel the broken bones under the blue and swollen skin. She wanted to install him in the bedroom, but he objected.

"We'll be here a long time, Toinette," he pointed out. "The ice will freeze when this blow is over, but there'll be no traveling on it. We can't go ashore, and no one will get here much before Christmas. If that's all the wood there is, we'll be able to keep only the kitchen warm. Have you looked for food? Captain Haynes wouldn't take it all back to Toledo."

She found flour, coffee, tea, and odds and ends of other eatables.

"There's no brandy, is there?" Placide demanded.

She came back to him presently, sniffing a bottle suspiciously.

He put it to his lips and wet his tongue.

"Cognac!" he exclaimed. "Thank good old Haynes for that!"

In quick succession, he drank three great drafts.

"I don't feel that pain so much now, Toinette," he declared.

She brought a mattress into a corner of the kitchen, moved him to it, and made him as comfortable as possible. There still remained the task of setting the broken leg, an operation about which the girl knew absolutely nothing.

Placide, however, had knowledge of the crude surgery that a man learns in the lumber shanties of the big woods. He told her what to do, how to pull this way and that, where to press, when to let go.

Toinette found she did not have the strength to pull the broken bones back into place. He bade her get a rope and pass it around the doorknob for leverage. He himself then pulled as she pressed.

It was dreadful, sickening. She felt herself growing faint, in sympathy with the suffering man.

Between them, the operation was accomplished at last. To serve as splints, she used cane fishing poles, hacked off to the needed length with a meat cleaver. A sheet served for bandage.

When she had finished, Placide asked for more of the cognac. He caught her hand and tried to draw it to his lips, but she pulled it away.

He looked at her sharply.

Her head was turned, and he could not see her eyes.

"Well, Toinette!" he exclaimed. "You saved my life—but you are angry with me. You don't love me any more, eh?"

His tone was tender again, but she slowly shook her head.

"Don't say that, little one," he went on. "There'll be good times yet for us. What's a broken leg? As for the Héloïse—I'll soon have another boat."

"There can be nothing more for you and me, Placide," she murmured, without turning her head. "You never loved me. Grandfather and Amador were right. It was I who loved."

She turned to face him suddenly. "Don't you see that I am to blame for all that has happened, Placide? If I had said no to you, Victor and Jules and Eli would be alive now."

Placide was up on his elbows at once, his face working.

"Your fault!" he cried, incredulously.

"No more your fault than mine. That damnable freighter was to blame. I didn't lose my boat by sailing her. As for Jules and Eli—that's the sea. Victor was a careless fool. But how close we came to reaching the Maumee! My leg wouldn't be driving me crazy—"

Perhaps it was the cognac, but he started to mumble to himself—sailor talk, disconnected, blurred. Presently he fell asleep.

Toinette watched him for half an hour. Then she built a bed of old clothes and pillows before the fire. Her undressing was limited to pulling off the boots she had found in the bedroom.

She was afraid to lift her hands in supplication before Placide, lest he awaken and mock her faith. On tiptoe she stole into the bedroom, and sank upon her knees, and prayed—not for herself—not for Placide—but for those three sailormen who would never again come to Joe Chevalier's.

XVIII

FROM the light keeper's house on Turtle Island one can see the black fringe of Bay Pointe, with its cedars dwarfed by distance to trunks no larger than matches. When snow was not falling, which was seldom enough, Toinette would stand at the window for minutes at a time, vainly trying to pick out some familiar object.

Bitter winds incessantly raked the island. It was a stout house, however, and Toinette felt secure within its walls.

As Placide predicted, the lake was frozen over, but great patches of black water showed here and there. When it snowed, they would crust over with snow ice—a death trap for the uninitiated.

Toinette recalled the winter, now six years gone, when her grandfather and René Dusseau had gone through the ice with a horse and cutter while on their way to Toledo. They had worked for hours trying to save the horse, but in vain.

Captain Haynes's store of wood soon became exhausted, and it was Toinette's daily duty to find fuel for the rapacious stove. An old rowboat solved the problem temporarily, but that, too, had now gone the way of all firewood.

For the last three days they had been burning dead locust, salvaged from the grove at the eastern end of the island. She had made herself a pair of mittens, but the thorns cut through them and stung her hands painfully.

She could not find a sign of the Héloïse. Placide had urged her to climb into the light itself for a better view, but the door was too well locked.

Trained in economy, she made their meager supply of fuel and food go a long way. Still, for all her effort, they were seldom warm, and usually hungry.

Placide suffered almost continuously, but, as time went on, he changed from impatience to dumb supplication, lying on the bed in the kitchen, and following her about with his eyes. He was completely helpless.

The evident pain that he suffered alone made it possible for her to act as nurse for a bedridden man.

The hurt he had given her did not heal; it was too deep, too cruel, for that. As a result, there were times when she could not drive herself to touch him.

She saw a change in Placide—his white face, the hollows in his cheeks, the silky beard that covered the once clean-shaven jaw. Those were physical changes; that was all. The wild, untamable fire had dimmed in his eyes, but she failed to notice this.

Once she had given herself into his keeping without knowing the least about him, but now she was well informed. It frightened her to think of what might have been the outcome of her mad infatuation.

Toinette told herself she no longer feared the man, and yet she could not have explained why she absented herself from the house, ostensibly looking for firewood, whenever chance presented. There was a feeling of escape about these absences, but it was largely escape from herself.

She knew they would leave the island when the ice was safe. The prospect was not altogether pleasing, for the mainland inevitably suggested her grandfather. She doubted that he would ever forgive her.

She would have to go to work. Where she was to find it, she did not know.

In a faint way, she relished the surprise her return would give, for certainly Victor's body had been washed ashore, and her fate likened to his. There was a certain disappointment, too, in being so complacently accepted as dead. Some one might have tried to find them—Cleophas, for instance.

When she was thoroughly fatigued from wandering in the deep snow, she would stumble homeward reluctantly, her arms half filled with wood. Placide must have wondered.

His eyes were always riveted on her as the door opened. That, in itself, made her dread the moment.

It was a questioning glance, more subtle than words. It gave her a feeling of being hunted, stalked; of the uselessness of trying to resist him.

Anger or violence from him she could have understood and combated, but that silent questioning, that mute probing of the very depths of her soul, was more than she could stand. One dusk, after they had been on the island for three weeks, Placide's eyes, as usual, picked her up as she stepped into the kitchen. Something snapped in Toinette's nerve centers.

"What do you want?" she screamed. "You lie there waiting for me—as if you expected me to run away. I'm not going to leave you. Why do you stare at me like that? What do you want?"

Placide was unprepared for her outburst.

"Why—why, nothing, Toinette," he replied slowly, his voice softer than usual.

"Nothing!" she cried, hysterically. "Do you call it nothing to lie there and watch me from morning till night? You are driving me mad!"

Her emotional reserve was swept away. She paced back and forth across the kitchen, unable to check her sobbing, wringing her hands.

Placide could not look away, although she screamed threats at him for his staring. This rage had been welling up in her for days, and she was unable to control it, now that she had given it leash.

Toinette went outside again, eventually.

It was long after dark before she stumbled home, and she did not glance toward the bed. She lighted the lamp and began preparing supper before she noticed that the crippled man was gone.

"Placide! Placide!" she cried, and began searching frantically for him.

In some way, he had managed to drag himself across the floor to the bedroom. A glad little whimper escaped the girl's lips as she dropped to her knees beside him. "Oh, Placide, you shouldn't have done that!" she declared, excitedly. "You know I told you not to get up."

"That's all right, Toinette," he said. "My leg doesn't hurt me so much as your crying. Bring the mattress in here, and you keep the kitchen."

"No, it's too damp in here, Placide. You'll catch cold in your leg. You are going back in the kitchen."

She picked him up almost bodily, and assisted him back to his bed.

"Are you sure you are all right, Placide?" she demanded, anxiously. "Don't ever do that again!"

He nodded, and turned his face to the wall. She still sat on the floor beside the bed, breathing heavily from her exertion. The fresh wood which she had put in the stove blazed merrily, making the kitchen really comfortable for the moment. Outside, the cracking ice boomed loudly.

A strange sense of peace descended on Placide Labadee. He put out a hand, and rested it lightly on Toinette's head. She did not brush it away.

That evening she dug deeply into their remaining supply of food, even melting the last of the sugar to make sirup for Placide's hot cakes. Later, he asked her to bring him Captain Haynes's fiddle. One string was missing, but he improvised skillfully.

The *complainte* of "*Le Retour Funeste*," dismal and tragic, gave way to the strains of "*Sept Ans Sur Mer*," a sailors' chantey better known on the shores of Brittany and Poitou than in Canada. Then followed the gayer "*Le Papillon Suit La Chandelle*," and inevitably the tender "*L'hirondelle, Messagère De L'amour*," the song of the swallow, messenger of love who finds the distant sweetheart and returns with his vow of faith.

The old fiddle set the shadows to dancing. The bare room lost its somberness. Eventually, it got to be nine o'clock; he had played for an hour.

He sat there, picking the strings aimlessly, wondering what he would play next. Failing to decide, he turned questioningly to Toinette.

He shook his head humbly, and a tender smile parted his lips as he beheld her. She was curled up, sound asleep, in her chair beside the fire.

XIX

OUTSIDE the kitchen door there hung a giant thermometer, the advertising gift of a Toledo clothier. Toinette always read it, morning and night.

For the following three days, however, it had no story to tell. The mercury went down into the bowl, and stayed there.

The ice no longer boomed. The stillness of a great cold settled over island and lake.

On the fourth day the weather tempered off gradually until it rained. Before morning the temperature fell again, leaving the ice clean and hard.

There was no longer any excuse for staying on the island. The talk of the marooned pair had all been of getting away, yet now neither broached the subject.

Placide Labadee had never been given to introspection, but these last days he had been hating and pitying himself at the same time. He began to view with growing annoyance the very deeds and conquests which had been his chief vanity.

Those women who, unbidden, trooped out of the shades to sit beside him as he viewed the panorama of his life, sickened him. How easily they had been won; how empty the victory! The very names of some had escaped his memory. There had been too many women in his life.

A woman had helped him to the Héloïse. He shuddered as he thought of her, for she could hardly be consigned to the impersonal past.

When he was hating himself the most, pride whispered that he had never taken any of them seriously—not even Toinette. The thought was a boomerang. Why hadn't he taken this girl seriously?

She had cared for him as no one else in the world would have cared, denying herself that he might have food to make him strong again. Where was he to find her like? Who was there to match her in faith, in pride, in simple devotion to all those things which he had once ridiculed and scorned?

Every day she became more desirable—and less attainable. He had wooed her in passion and lost her in love.

He knew that so much better than she did herself. These weeks of close intimacy on the island would brand her in the eyes of her people. Only marriage would still the tongue of gossip, satisfy the church, and mollify her grandfather. It was the great social cure-all which nobody questioned. The misery and unhappiness of the enslaved did not matter.

Placide shook his head to himself. Toinette would not enter into such an arrangement. She had defied the world for him, and she would as certainly find strength to defy it for herself.

There must be some way in which he could atone for the wrong he had done her. In his pocket there were one hundred dollars. Grandfather Chevalier owed him another hundred. It was not much, but more than most families along the bay had to see them through the winter. Toinette was strong; she could work, too.

By spring his leg would be mended again, and he could set about getting a new boat. He skipped lightly over that part of his plans; it had taken him five years to repay the loan that had made the Héloïse his.

He gave some thought to what his reception ashore might be. He doubted that his personal safety would be involved.

He was convinced that Grandfather Chevalier had fired the shot at him the night he had taken Toinette away. But that had been only a warning; it hardly would be repeated.

Old Joe's enmity, as well as Sam Drouillard's, would pursue him. Many would take their cue from them. But in the end their unfriendliness must melt. If not, he could give blows as well as receive them.

Toinette had been out most of the morning, searching for material to finish the sled that was to carry him over the ice to the bay. That afternoon, Placide directing, she used hammer and saw, with an old bench for the body of the sled, and finally the crude affair was finished.

"It's stout, Placide," she said, proudly.

He nodded his head admiringly.

"It would seem so," he agreed. "Six miles is a long distance, Toinette."

All afternoon he had been under her spell, stealing sly glances at her rounded arms and white throat. His blood went

warm as he watched her moving about so lithely. The girl appeared unaware of the intentness of his gaze as she ran her fingers through her hair, catching up the loose strands.

"Grandfather always said it was only five miles to the light. If the wind isn't blowing too hard, I won't mind."

"You are a brave girl, Toinette."

His tone was so tender that she shrank unconsciously.

"When are we going to leave?" he asked, more to cover his own emotion than for any other reason. "Perhaps to-morrow morning—"

"Or the following day," Toinette interrupted quickly.

"You don't seem anxious to get away," he remarked slowly. "Your grandfather—"

"Oh, no, it's not myself I am thinking of. It's you, Placide."

"I?" he questioned, a little breathlessly.

"Yes. What are you going to do? Where are you to go? I know my grandfather will not forgive me—and surely he will not take you in."

"So you think of me, instead of yourself, Toinette! You do care for me, little wren! Oh, don't go away!" He reached out and put an arm around her waist. "Why nigh me, Toinette? You are mine! I love you! Can't you see I do?"

He suddenly seized her in his arms and kissed her, although she tried frantically to evade his lips. At last she pushed him back on the bed and sprang away, with her face buried in her hands.

"How could you do that to me, Placide?" she mumbled, brokenly.

He drew in his breath in a despairing gasp. How still the room grew then.

"I—I pity you, Placide!" she half whispered.

"I love you, Toinette! Promise that you'll marry me as soon as we reach shore. I'm no longer the mad man I was. I've changed. Don't tell me you are going back to marry Xavier Drouillard."

She smiled slightly as she shook her head, and he never had seen quite that sort of smile on her lips before, so tender, so wistful.

"No," she said evenly. "Xavier wouldn't want me now. I'm not going to marry any one, Placide."

So she knew, after all! He could only stare at her helplessly, truly hopeless for once in his life.

She was preparing their supper before he found courage to speak again.

"Cook everything there is left, Toinette," he advised. "We'll leave to-morrow. It will give you more strength than if you eat it in the morning."

For the first evening in a week or more he did not ask for the fiddle.

The following morning broke clear and cold. They had no preparations to make. Toinette helped Placide upon the sled, and, with hardly a look around, went away without difficulty through the snow on the beach.

Once on the lake, the going was even easier. Almost in silence, they drew away from the island. The sun began to shine with dazzling brightness, turning the world about them to queer greens and blinding reds.

Toinette chose her course by instinct, moving ahead with eyes half closed against the brilliant light, unable to discern either the distant shore or a black speck that was moving rapidly over the ice toward her.

XX

TOINETTE did not find it necessary to rest, although Placide urged her to do so from time to time. She had covered almost half the distance to the mainland when a distant shouting stopped her abruptly. Shading her eyes with her hands, she saw a man drop the sled he had been dragging and run toward them.

"Who is it?" Placide demanded, excitedly, propping himself up on his elbow.

"I can't tell yet," Toinette replied. "It must be some one looking for us."

The distance between the runner and them diminished quickly.

"It's Cleophas!" Toinette exclaimed, a minute later, her voice betraying the gladness of her discovery.

In a few seconds he was up to them, more agitated than Toinette had ever seen him before.

"So, it's you!" he cried, breathing heavily, his voice husky with emotion and his great bulk trembling. In his joy at finding her, he ignored Placide.

Toinette felt herself going to pieces.

"Cleophas!" she gasped, pitifully.

Good old Cleophas—always the friend in need! She could not withstand the impulse to fling herself into his arms. She ran to him, and, with her head buried against his shoulder, let her tears rain un-

checked. So hurt things come home to rest.

Cleophas was as much surprised as Placide at the girl's action. It had required something like this to arouse the young blacksmith, and, as Toinette wept, the mastiff glared at the wolfhound.

Wrath sat queerly on Cleophas's kindly face, but Placide was not fooled. Cleophas had gained what he had lost.

Smiling tremulously through her tears, Toinette raised her head, and spoke. "You thought I was dead, Cleophas?"

"No," he replied. "I've known for weeks—we've all known, for that matter—that some one was on the island. We saw the smoke day after day. Soon after Flygette La Plante found Victor's body, some wreckage of the Héloïse came ashore. From that, we knew she had gone down; but the fire on the island said plainly that all aboard had not been lost. Since some one was there, I would not admit you had been drowned. Were there just the two of you?"

"Yes. Jules and Eli went down with the schooner. Oh, it was awful, Cleophas! We struck the wreck of the Dean Richmond. It was not Placide's fault."

"No," he remarked noncommittally, and for the first time he addressed himself to Placide. "What's the matter with you, Labadee?"

"I broke my leg," Placide answered, indifferently.

"In three places," Toinette supplemented. "I don't believe he'll ever walk on it again. We couldn't set it properly."

If she expected Cleophas to express any sympathy, she was mistaken. He pressed her for details of the wreck and their life on the island.

"Then you are all right?" he asked, when she had finished, and his eyes were on Placide's rather than on hers.

Both understood him perfectly. Placide's lips curled scornfully. Toinette, with cheeks flaming, nodded her head. A sigh of relief escaped Cleophas.

"You found that question necessary?" Placide demanded insolently.

Cleophas stared back without answering at once.

"You forget that she was with you," he said then. "My faith in her is as great as my distrust of you. I helped you to her, because she would have it that way. It was I who tripped up Amador that night,

and gave you your chance to get to your boat. My regard for Toinette did not depend on her answer now, but my feeling toward you did. If you had always been so solicitous of her good name, she would have been spared all this."

Placide held back the sharp retort that simmered on his tongue.

"You speak the truth," he said finally. "But I promise you that the one who questions her will answer to me."

"No, Placide!" Toinette exclaimed. "Make no threats. Hot words will not turn their tongues. But, Cleophas, what of my grandfather?"

"I—I wouldn't let that matter so much, Toinette," he stammered, sparring for his real answer. "You know how he is given to thundering."

Toinette would not be put off. "Has he sworn never to forgive me, Cleophas?"

"He thinks you were drowned, but when I told him about the smoke on the island, he would not listen to my plans for crossing the ice."

The girl remained dry-eyed. The situation was no more than she had feared, but the bay suddenly became the last place in the world she wished to see.

When Cleophas had transferred Placide to his sled, and urged them to eat some of the food which he carried, he found Toinette reluctant to go on. He surmised the reason.

"Don't think you are without friends, Toinette," he said, encouragingly. "They'll all be glad to see you again. They've missed you, every one of them, even your grandfather. Like as not, he'll throw his arms around you when he sees you."

She was not easily convinced, and when her own fears had been somewhat allayed, she became concerned about what was to become of Placide.

"You worry yourself unnecessarily," Cleophas told her, a bit impatiently. "I'll find a place for Captain Labadee."

"Of course," Placide affirmed. "What about Azalma? I guess she would be glad to have me; I can pay my way."

Toinette accepted this indefinite plan, and walked on beside Cleophas. Familiar objects began to appear before long, and in spite of herself she quickened her pace.

"They're racing on the ice to-day," Cleophas informed them. "There are four or five cutters out. See them?"

"Yes, but I cannot recognize the driv-

ers; they're too far away. I suppose the Morrin boys and Xavier Drouillard are among them," Toinette remarked.

"Yes, and Dan La Pointe is down, too. They all had their horses in to be shod yesterday. They haven't seen us yet. Some of them will drive over as soon as they do."

In the next few minutes his prophecy was fulfilled. One driver, executing a sharp turn, headed directly for them.

Cleophas recognized the horse while it was still some distance away. Toinette saw him scowl. "It's Xavier," he announced. "He'll do well to keep his tongue!"

"You see that he does, Cleophas," Placide urged.

Toinette turned angrily on both of them at that.

"I never was afraid of Xavier Drouillard before!" she cried. "What have I done that I should fear him now? I'll answer for myself if he speaks unfairly."

Xavier sensed their hostility as he pulled up his horse, and he attempted to brazen it out by exclaiming heartily: "Well, well! Alive after all!"

Somehow the gesture was like a boy playing at being a man by wearing his father's hat. Xavier was immediately uncomfortable. His eyes sparkled maliciously as he turned his attention from Toinette to Placide.

"Captain Labadee does not seem to have fared so well," he remarked, pointedly.

"So it would appear," Placide replied, flatly. Even though he was recumbent, his tone caused Xavier to address his further remarks to Toinette.

"This will be news for your grandfather," he declared with evident relish.

"I'm surprised that you tarry here, Xavier, when you might be spreading your gossip," the girl declared warmly. "I know my grandfather would prefer to hear it from you."

He knew he had reached her sensibilities, and he laughed to himself. How he would have liked to cow her, to humble her, as she so richly deserved! Well, maybe that day would come yet.

Out of the tail of his eye he saw Placide glaring at him, and in his nervousness he said foolishly: "I presume the captain will marry you, now that you are back."

"That does not concern you at all," Placide snapped out, half rising in his an-

ger. "If I could get on my feet I would send you about your business with the toe of my boot." Turning to Cleophas, he asked: "Why do we stay here, wasting our time on this young busybody?"

"For no reason at all," Cleophas answered. "Move your horse, Xavier."

"I'll move my horse when I am ready. Captain Labadee, who are you to threaten me? You lost your boat; you're penniless. And the men who sailed with you? I don't see them. You managed to save Toinette, though, didn't you? The two of you have been living together on the island for weeks. And now you dare—"

"Stop!" Cleophas roared, grabbing him by the arm and pulling him halfway out of his sleigh. "I warn you; keep your tongue!"

As Xavier tried to break his hold, Toinette pushed Cleophas back and faced the driver.

"Punish him, Cleophas!" Placide shouted. "Give him the whip!"

"No! He'll answer to me for that," Toinette insisted. "The young beast! You know we were not living together, as you put it. What right have you to think such a thing?"

"Well, we all know why he ran off with you," Xavier retorted, emboldened by the fact that he was facing a woman now. "What right have you to put on airs? Time will prove what you were doing on the island. Before summer comes, you'll be begging him to marry you."

The unrelieved cruelty of what he said, stunned Cleophas. In the half second that he stood motionless, Toinette yanked the whip out of the socket and laid Xavier's face open with one fierce stroke. Instinctively, young Drouillard pulled on the reins, and the startled horse dashed away.

"Go, you whelp!" Cleophas shouted after him.

"Come here," Placide murmured to Toinette, but she stood numbly, with the whip still clutched in her hand. Cleophas turned to her.

"He deserved worse than that, Toinette," he said. "What a whelp he is! He'll not go back to the others with that face. See? He is turning in to the shore. He'll sneak home as quickly as he can."

Toinette spasmodically opened her fingers and let the whip fall upon the ice.

"I—I can't go on, Cleophas," she declared, brokenly.

"What?" he asked, incredulously. "Are you going to let Xavier accomplish the very thing he set out to do? Who cares what he thinks or says?"

The other drivers, and a couple of men on foot, were coming toward them in a body. Cleophas picked up his sled rope and started off.

"You couldn't turn back now if you wanted to," he said, gently. "Be brave, Toinette."

Noisy Dave Morrin shouted and cursed harmlessly in his surprise at seeing them. In a few minutes they were surrounded by an excited, inquisitive throng.

Where were Jules and Eli? How had the Héloïse been wrecked? What was the matter with Placide? Why had Xavier turned off so unexpectedly?

Their tone was quite different from Xavier's. Toinette could not help a faint, wan smile at the heartiness of her reception, and even Placide was pleasantly surprised.

"Come on!" Dave exclaimed. "I'll hitch your sled to my cutter. You get in with me, Toinette; I'll drive slowly."

"Did you hear that?" Flygette La Plante chaffed. "Dave says he's going to drive slowly."

A merry chorus met this sally. Fancy Dave Morrin driving at anything but breakneck speed.

"Don't you believe him," Dave's brother said, laughingly. "He spoiled Mrs. Malby's funeral with his fast driving."

All were conscious of the drama that impended, and when Morrin drew up before Grandfather Chevalier's cabin, they gathered about him. Dave paid no attention to them, but yelled out in a voice to wake the dead:

"Hey, you, Joe! See what I've got here!"

XXI

GRANDFATHER CHEVALIER was not taken by surprise. For the last ten minutes, with the aid of his long glass, he had been scanning the little party moving across the ice.

Amador had called attention to their coming, and, at his first glance, old Joe's face had relaxed. Amador's sigh of relief at this had been short, for the grandfather's expression had immediately changed to rage, as he remembered his hatred of Placide and the shame that Toinette had brought on him.

His wrong was very real to him. He had watched over Toinette like an eagle. Placide Labadee, with his smooth tongue and devil's grin, had betrayed his friendship. His own flesh and blood had betrayed his trust.

In his time, Chevalier had been a smuggler. He often received and disposed of stolen goods. But these were matters of business; a man had to live.

Until now no woman of his name had ever shamed him. He groaned bitterly.

There was no place for her here. She had soiled his only priceless possession, and neither tears nor promises should unbar the door to her. He said as much to Amador.

"But you are too quick to condemn," his old friend objected. "She is alive. Be thankful for that. She is only a child; and you should hear her story before you refuse to forgive."

"I'll hear no story. Don't let her come here. She knew what she was doing, child or not."

Because of the crowd at the bay to-day, he was less sober than usual, but there was no indecision in his manner as he ordered his friend to send the girl away.

Amador closed the door behind him as he stepped out. The crowd surged forward eagerly.

"Where's Joe?" Dave Morrin demanded loudly, blusteringly. He knew where Joe was, well enough.

Amador did not answer him at once. His eyes leaped to Toinette. He mumbled her name, and his lips trembled as he saw the disillusionment and suffering and misery in her face.

Toinette's eyes filled, and she took a step toward him, her hands half raised in appeal. If any one could sway her grandfather, it was Amador.

But he shook his head discouragingly, and held her off with the sudden sternness of his gaze. "Wait, Toinette," he muttered, and, turning to Morrin, asked him to get the others away.

"What? He knows we are here and refuses to come out?" Dave demanded, feeling that the crowd expected something of him. "I'll get him out!" he roared.

Amador tried to stop him, but he pushed the old man out of the way and flung back the door. He took only one step forward, and then recoiled as if on springs, for there, his rifle across his knees, sat old

Joe, his fierce old eyes flaming through half closed lids.

Dave was a braggart, and something of a bully, but he was not a fool. He changed front immediately.

"Come on, Joe," he begged, careless now of what the others might think. "Toinette is here; she is all right."

Grandfather Chevalier was not to be conciliated.

"This is my house," he thundered, "and no one enters here against my will. Go; the pack of you!"

Dave started to speak, but old Joe cut him off with a word: "Go!" He did not have to lift his rifle. Dave backed out, and the others moved away with him.

Cleophas glanced at Amador.

"You stay," Amador said; "and you, Toinette." He caught her by the hand and pulled her toward the door. "Speak to him yourself," he commanded.

Amador's defiance came as a thunderbolt. Grandfather Chevalier's face went white, and, as Toinette stepped forward, he attempted to cover his eyes so that he might not see her. But he was too late.

Toinette was there, facing him, and now he could not look away. She had changed so much.

He searched in vain for some sign of the tomboy she had been. Some subtle alchemy had taken place in her.

She was thinner than ever he had seen her before, and she carried herself differently. No trace of her childish awkwardness remained.

As she held her hands out to him in supplication, there was a strange grace and an unlooked for dignity in her pose. And slowly, as he continued to stare at her, he came to realize that Toinette was a woman, and old memories laid violent hands on him and plucked at his heart.

He tried to read in her face the story of what she had done these endless weeks she had been away. There was no sign of guilt on it; no trace of wrongdoing.

Yet, he had only to remember the man with whom she had fled to know that his eyes deceived him; Placide Labadee was not one to be cheated of his game. No man or woman was guileless enough to believe in a girl's innocence after such an affair as this!

By such thoughts did Grandfather Chevalier fan his faltering pride into flame as Toinette stood before him. She was over-

whelmed by all the pleasant little memories which this familiar spot evoked. It was home, and as her eyes leaped about the low-ceilinged room, a sob shook her.

Fear seized old Joe—a fear such as he had never before known. It was a fear that, despite all his vows and thundering, he would be unable to send the girl away. He got out of his chair and stood before her with his clenched fist outstretched.

"Go!" he shouted. "There is no place for you here. And if you don't know where to turn, ask those whose advice you were so willing to take when you left. Don't ever put your foot in this house again!"

"Have a care!" Cleophas exclaimed hotly as he stood squarely before Grandfather Chevalier. "She has done no wrong, I tell you."

"You tell me, eh?" old Joe mocked him. "And I tell you they have been living together for weeks on the island."

"Not the way in which you infer," Cleophas declared. "You are letting your temper sweep away all your judgment."

They glared at each other.

"So you turn on me, too?" Grandfather Chevalier snarled. "And yet you once wanted her yourself. I thought to find you on my side, but you tell me she has done nothing wrong. You would have had her go with Labadee, then, eh?"

"No! But she would go—and, since it was her wish, I helped her to go."

"Well, you did her a great service," the old man retorted, and laughed evilly. "What have you made of her? Who would marry her now?"

Cleophas Recor forgot to be embarrassed, now that there was need of poise.

"I will marry her, if she will have me," he answered steadily.

Old Chevalier tried to eye him down, but failed. His rage mounted again.

"What a fine mate you'd be for her, you lout," he snarled. "Again I say to the pack of you—go!"

He half raised his rifle as he lurched forward. The others fell back a step, but Toinette did not move.

As in a dream, she heard Cleophas defy her grandfather, but what he said only vaguely reached her consciousness. She had been ordered to go. That was real.

The thing she had feared had come to pass sooner than she expected. How foolish they were to argue with her grandfather. He never changed his mind.

Where was she to go? If her own grandfather would not have her, was it likely Cleophas's father would take her in?

Every nook and cranny of this sturdy cabin in which she stood held childhood memories and tender associations. Like the woodland fern which thrives on a handful of soil in some rocky crevice, she might wither and die if transplanted.

She caught Placide's eyes on her. He was homeless, too, but he had money; he would find a way. She stood alone, penniless as well as homeless.

She looked around at all of them, and her glance came to rest on Cleophas, again the rock in the storm. She asked herself if she loved him, and the answer was no.

Grandfather Chevalier's eyes did not lose their glitter as he stared at her, but he dropped back a step in fear that he might fail to be stern. And, to save himself, he pointed again to the door.

Toinette clasped her hands to her breast as she swayed before him.

"No, grandfather," she cried, sinking to her knees. "Don't send me away! I disobeyed you, but I have done no wrong; not what you think. You need me as much as I need you. See, the dishes are not washed; the windows are dirty. And Hon-orine—who takes care of her?"

She smiled at him through her tears.

"Grandfather, you often said there was no one could cook like Toinette. Let me stay and care for you. No matter how it storms this winter, I'll drive to Vienna any time. And when spring comes, who is to plant the potatoes if I am not here? I won't disobey you again. Don't send me away!"

A sob choked her, and she did not go on for a moment.

"I thought I loved Placide; that was my mistake. But I have done no wrong—have I, Placide?"

Grandfather Chevalier shook his head mercilessly.

"You appeal to him to bear you out!" he taunted. "I trusted him and called him friend, and he repaid me with this. No, I tell you to go before I throw you out!"

In his rage, he seized her and pushed her back. Amador jumped in front of Toinette and struck old Joe's hand down.

"So you really want her to go!" he exclaimed, as beside himself as was Grandfather Chevalier. "Have it your own way,

then! I did everything I could to prevent her going with Placide, even to putting a bullet close to his head, but she thought she loved him, and she went in spite of us. Now she's back, and if there's been any wrong done, you can blame yourself."

Amador paused for a moment, as if daring Chevalier to dispute his statements.

"You dared him to take her; and he did. I see now that it wasn't Toinette you were thinking of, half so much as yourself. If ever a man gave warning of his intention, Placide warned you. But you wouldn't believe that any one lived rash enough to defy you. You know differently now. As for Toinette—she still is one of us. And since you will not take her in—I will!"

Grandfather Chevalier stood speechless. It was all so unexpected from Amador. Toinette glanced from the old bay man to Placide in dumb amazement. Cleophas nodded his head approvingly.

"Come, Toinette; you, too, Cleophas!" Amador commanded, with a wave of his hand, indicating the sled rope.

Toinette threw out her hands in a last despairing gesture to her grandfather. Old Joe turned his back on her.

Numbly she reached out for Amador and stumbled away on his arm. Cleophas held out his hands to help her, but she went on, unseeing. Catching up the sled rope, he followed after them, dragging Placide.

It needed a painter to catch the somber spirit of that scene—the little procession tramping across the snow, coldly pink, now, as the December sun burned feebly through a leaden cloud bank; the black cedars; the bundled figure on the sled. In the doorway of the long, low cabin was the squat figure of the unkempt old man, fingering a rifle trigger.

From a distance, Dave Morrin and the others saw, but said no word. When at last Grandfather Chevalier kicked the door to, they turned away to discuss the situation among themselves.

Darkness fell early, but old Joe did not strike a light. The gentle glow from the fireplace revealed him, now comfortably drunk, as he paced the length of the room, talking to himself, his face working strangely, and his old eyes flashing with baffled rage.

Amador's defection had caused his cup of bitterness to overflow. They were all against him.

In some way, Placide Labadee would pay for what he had done, and so would Amador. As for Toinette, he might have forgiven her eventually, had she been contrite enough, but now? Never!

He got out his cutter and headed for town, taking the winter road up the frozen creek as far as Flygette La Plante's, where the main road passed. He had one ally left—Sam Drouillard.

If Sam refused the usual credit against the spring catch of fur, perhaps Amador would find he had too many mouths to feed. When Placide and Toinette were shown the door, who else on the bay would dare to take them in?

XXII

In the summer, when the people on the bay used the road which ran past Amador's cabin, seldom a day passed that some passer-by did not stop at the little shanty on Muddy Creek for a friendly word.

In winter, for days at a time, no one passed. If neighbors now dropped in more frequently, or some of the bay dwellers chose the longer road past Amador's, it was because of the presence of Toinette and Placide.

Strangely enough, they never left without a whispered word with either Amador or his brother, Antoine. Toinette sensed that she was the subject of those last minute conferences.

Even Azalma, whose friendship she had always treasured, smiled at her too slyly. Delphine Roubideaux suggested that Toinette go to Toledo. The girl demanded why; she had nothing to hide. Delphine stammered, and said she didn't mean that; but she did not call again.

Toinette began to be rude with those who came, in one guise or another, merely to satisfy their curiosity and carry away food for gossip. Eugene Malby was an exception. He came often, bringing his verses, or to read some book which he had come by miraculously.

Placide was still unable to walk. He and Eugene got on well together, talking for hours.

Toinette saw nothing of her grandfather. Amador had seen him in town, but they had not spoken.

Cleophas did not appear, and, as days passed, his absence began to pique the girl. She wondered if pressure was being exerted at home to keep him away.

She tried to forget him in her household duties. Amador and Antoine submitted with docility to her petty tyrannies, although they could see no sense in endless house cleaning and scrubbing of pots and pans.

Eugene Malby came again on Saturday evening. Toinette knew he and Cleophas were the best of friends.

"Is it because people are talking about me that he stays away?" she asked.

"You should know better than that, Toinette," Eugene chided her.

"Then he is not offended?"

"Certainly not." Eugene spread his hands deprecatingly. "It's plain enough that even you fail to understand him. He is as sensitive as a girl. If he stays away, it is because he fears his presence here would embarrass you. There is Placide, you know."

Toinette bit her lip at this obvious statement. "Forgive me, Eugene," she murmured. "But there is no reason why he should not come. Tell him I want to see him."

Eugene managed to send word to Cleophas that night, and, as a result, Cleophas came early Sunday morning, behind his pair of high-stepping grays. He was dressed in his Sunday best.

"I came early, as I thought you would like to go to mass, Toinette," he explained, doing his best to appear casual as he shook hands all around.

Toinette blushed, and appeared to be unable to decide whether she should like to go or not.

"Go," Amador urged. "It will do you good. The road is in fine shape. Let's see the dress you've been making."

"Why shouldn't you go?" Placide demanded, as Toinette glanced at him.

"You should know why," she replied, frankly. "They've been talking about me."

"I should not let their talking disturb me," Cleophas declared with deep conviction. "You'll do more to stop their tongues by seeming not to care."

"That's good sense," Amador agreed. "Go; you have little enough time. You don't want to sulk here until the *curé* comes to chastise you."

Toinette had been secretly dreading Father Braire's call. He was as punctual about his pastoral visits as the stars in their courses, and neither wind nor storm could stay him.

"All right!" she exclaimed. "I shall go, and let them make the most of it."

She was ready, presently, and very pretty in her new dress. Excitement had colored her cheeks, and she was more like her old self than they had seen her in weeks.

"You do well as a seamstress," Amador declared, as he backed off to behold her. "I tell you, I've never seen anything prettier on the bay."

Amador had bought the goods for her; no trifling expenditure for him. Moved by a sudden impulse, Toinette threw her arms around his neck and kissed him.

"I'm proud of it, too, Amador!" she cried.

"But go, now," he urged, "or Cleophas will have his team in a lather by the time you strike town."

He came out to see them off, and stood looking after them as they drove away.

"Joe should see her to-day, the stubborn old fool!" he muttered savagely, and, turning to the wood pile, swung his ax furiously.

Placide had watched them go, too. He had hobbled to the window, and stood there until they were out of sight.

Although he had urged her to go with Cleophas, he knew that it meant the breaking of the last slender thread that bound her to him. For weeks he had known that she no longer loved him.

At times he took a savage delight in torturing himself with memories of his folly. Even Eli, stanchest of friends, had demurred in this affair of taking Toinette away, and tried his best to stay him.

Placide's inactivity irked him, and he hated the way the world had of getting on without him. He had no plans for the immediate future, other than that he was not going back to Canada until he knew what was to become of Toinette.

He had been counting the days that must elapse before he could walk again. Toinette had cautioned him to wait, but, in his bitterness, he determined to risk it now.

Pulling himself erect, he lurched across the floor, his face contorted with pain. He caught hold of a chair, and, leaning on it, managed to get back to his bed.

Amador came in as he let himself down.

"So you can walk!" Amador remarked, as he studied Placide shrewdly. He surmised that Toinette's going off with Cle-

ophas was responsible for the Canadian's effort.

"I couldn't stand waiting any longer," Placide ground out. "It took my breath—but I walked! Don't tell Toinette. I hope Eugene is able to borrow the crutches he spoke of. I'll be ready for them in a day or two."

They smoked for awhile without speaking. Both were thinking of Cleophas.

"I'd like to see Sam Drouillard's face when Toinette walks up the aisle with Cleophas," Amador said, finally. "He'll be lucky if he doesn't have a stroke."

"It was fine, his taking her that way," Placide asserted, as he stared into the fire. "Cleophas is no fool; he knows what he is bringing down on himself, and is willing to let them do their worst."

Amador removed his pipe from his mouth and nodded sagely.

"Old Etienne, his father, won't like it; and it may cost him some business at the forge. It is too bad, Labadee."

"It is; but, I tell you, Amador, Cleophas may marry Toinette yet."

Amador pondered over the thought for a minute or two.

"Yes," he agreed. "He will, if they keep up their talking. They'll drive her into marrying him."

Placide glanced at him a little incredulously, for his tone was disapproving.

"It might be the best thing that could happen to Toinette," he said, moodily.

"No, you don't seem to understand, captain." Amador got up and knocked the dead ashes from his pipe. "Cleophas is a fine lad, but Toinette will never be happy if she marries him now. Do you think marrying him would stop these wagging tongues? If there is a mark on Toinette, you put it there, and no one but you can ever erase it. If she is to marry, you are the man she ought to wed."

This was the first time Amador had declared himself. He made no effort to soften the rebuke which his words carried.

"And that she'll never do!" Placide declared. "Even if she were to marry me, do you think that would make everything right?"

"It would make things right, as far as other people are concerned. This affair on the island would be referred to then as a romantic lark. If Toinette marries any one but you, she'll never see a happy day."

Placide shook his head as he stared un-

seeingly off into space. He knew there was truth in what Amador said. But he had hurt Toinette too deeply already, and now he loved her too well to have the further indignity of being forced to marry him visited upon her.

XXIII

SOON after leaving Muddy Creek a great silence fell on Toinette and Cleophas. His team appeared to need a great deal of attention, and Toinette, who had been so anxious to see him, found nothing to say.

When they did speak, it was about the weather, the condition of the roads, or the health of some chronic invalid. Never, by chance, did they put into words those more personal thoughts which occupied the minds of both.

And yet they found a peculiar happiness in being together again. Once, when they were almost within sight of town, Toinette's hand accidentally touched Cleophas's wrist. She felt him tremble beneath her touch. It warmed her, and emboldened her to a degree of frankness.

"Does your father know you are taking me to mass, Cleophas?"

"No," he answered promptly.

"He may not like it."

"He must please himself about that. If it displeases him, I am sorry. I have been a dutiful son."

"Every one knows that. But maybe it would be better if I went into church alone."

"You'll go with me!" Cleophas declared, his eyes flashing fire. "And proud I'll be to have them see me with you. I tell you, Toinette, you distress yourself unnecessarily over what some one may think about you. You have nothing to fear; you are better than the best of them."

"It's nice of you, Cleophas, to say that. But how can I forget that they are talking about me? Do they go so far as to call me a—a bad woman?"

"Not to me, they don't, you may be sure," he replied, fiercely. "God help the one that does!"

"You see you mind, too, don't you, Cleophas? And yet you tell me to pay no attention to them. What is it they say?"

"Oh, nothing," he muttered, miserable at having been trapped so easily.

"If you will not tell me, who am I to ask?" Toinette inquired. "You must tell me the truth."

"Well, they say Placide would marry you if you were as innocent as you claim to be," he replied, grudgingly.

"I suppose that would prove my innocence!" Toinette exclaimed, with fine sarcasm. "How I hate them! What do they care for me, for my happiness? Nothing! I shall never marry Placide Labadee. How could I, Cleophas? I don't love him. Even Amador suggested that I marry Placide; that it would be the best thing for me. They're breaking my heart!"

She threw her arms about him and made him look at her. "Why do they keep on hurting me?" she cried, piteously. "Why can't they let me be? Must I go away?"

"What—and prove them right! Never! You stay. We'll fight this out together."

She was crying softly. Cleophas put his arm about her and comforted her tremblingly, awkwardly.

"We are nearly in town, now," he cautioned. "Don't let them see tears in your eyes, Toinette."

They were the last to arrive, and so their entrance passed unnoticed, but no sooner were they inside the church than a stifling stillness descended. It was so noticeable that Father Braire paused to turn inquiringly. His shaggy eyebrows lifted in complete surprise.

Then quickly the priest in him overcame the man, he nodded benignly, and turned back to his altar. The congregation seemed to have been watching him for their cue, and its members drew in their breath sharply as they lowered their eyes and the mass continued.

Toinette was a bit breathless, and she leaned heavily on Cleophas as he escorted her to the family pew. Cleophas's father was its only occupant. He glanced up incredulously as he saw his son kneel and stand back for Toinette to enter.

She managed a feeble smile of recognition, fearing the scowl which she expected would follow. Old Etienne had eyes only for his son, however, and all through mass he glanced at him furtively, too bewildered for prayer.

After the first few minutes, Toinette's nervousness passed, and her beads slipped noiselessly through her fingers as she said her Our Fathers and Hail Marys. Through it all she felt some one scrutinizing her fixedly, and at the offertory she stole a glance at the pew opposite, and met the malevolent eyes of Sam Drouillard.

His face was an apoplectic red. Toinette enjoyed his rage. If there was one person in the world who could not frighten her, it was Sam Drouillard. She grinned at him deliberately.

Mr. Drouillard ground his teeth, and his bristling hair seemed to stand even more erect as he fought to contain himself. Xavier was with him, and he flashed a furious glance at Toinette before he turned to calm his father. When he had his parent in hand, he looked across the aisle at Toinette again, but this time he encountered Cleophas's stare, and he promptly turned back to his father.

When the mass was over, the Drouillards bustled out at once. Toinette did not doubt but what they were making their way to the rectory, to discuss her presence there with the *curé*.

"Father Braire will want to see you," Cleophas whispered. "We will not hurry out."

This was not unexpected. It was Father Braire's custom, summer and winter, to bid good-by to his parishioners from the steps of the church.

Often had he pinched Toinette's cheeks and called her a good girl as she passed out with the others. She wondered what word he would have for her to-day.

This moment after church was something to be looked forward to all week long. There one heard the news of the parish, and, when the *curé's* back was turned, the gossip, too. Young lovers tarried and stole shy glances at each other, thinking their elders none the wiser.

If by chance any one had a new gown or hat, it was certain to be seen there, weather permitting. For this brief quarter of an hour the young men preened themselves, until some one like Dave Morrin arrived to shame them with his patent leather shoes and gorgeous waistcoats.

After the first greetings, the men drew off to one side to discuss the condition of the roads, the price of skins, the prospects for the crops. Their good wives discoursed on such standard subjects as Mrs. Gagnier's rheumatism, the high price of sugar, Father Braire's annual visit to Detroit.

To-day, however, the little groups were silent. Men and women, young and old, stood about expectantly, unmindful of the snow which was falling again, the forerunner of a real storm.

The *curé* came out presently, a heavy,

cape thrown over his shoulders, but with his head bare. His rubicund countenance wore its usual paternal smile.

He passed from one to another with a smile and word of greeting, casting his eyes heavenward repeatedly. "I'll not keep you long to-day," he said, so all might hear. "The storm we have been expecting is here. I trust you will reach home before it settles down in earnest."

This hint and warning, for it was both, fell on deaf ears. Only one or two couples moved away toward the long sheds where the teams were tied.

Toinette and Cleophas came out, then, and immediately fifty pairs of curious eyes were fastened on them.

The *curé* spread his arms wide, and advanced toward Toinette.

The crowd gasped. It was not for this that they had waited.

"So my little bird has come back to me, eh?" Father Braire queried, as he put a fatherly arm about the girl and patted her shoulder. "It is well for you that you came to-day, for it was in my mind to go to Muddy Creek to-morrow."

Toinette could hardly contain herself for joy. Was it this friendly home-coming that she had feared?

"It's too bad I haven't more young men like Cleophas to find the backsliders and bring them to me," the priest went on. "You must have a lot to tell me, Antoinette. Come to my house; I'll not keep you standing here in the snow. I am sure Cleophas will wait."

He cheated the crowd, but he had done it so nicely that even Toinette wondered if it were intentional.

Once seated in his parlor, Father Braire's manner changed. Toinette looked around fearfully, half-expecting to find Xavier and his father there.

"Now that we are alone, I may speak frankly," the *curé* began sternly. "You saw how they waited just now, hoping I might throw them a morsel of gossip. There's been too much talk already. I am glad to see you, my child, but not so glad as I pretended. You have hurt me grievously. Ah, but don't cry! I have always been your friend, Antoinette, and I want only to advise you now. Why haven't you been to confession?"

"I was afraid to come." Toinette wrung her hands nervously, and stared at the floor.

"Afraid to come! Why should you be afraid, if you have done nothing to offend our Heavenly Father?"

"I—I don't know," she gasped. "I was just afraid. Every one talks about me."

"And why shouldn't they? You have upset us all. It was wrong of you to defy your grandfather, to run off as you did."

"But I loved Placide so, father," Toinette murmured, with lips quivering. "I couldn't marry Xavier Drouillard."

"Well, I did not insist on your marrying Xavier. But were you so ignorant of life as not to suspect the honorableness of a love that swore one to such secrecy?"

"But Placide promised to marry me."

Father Braire paused ominously.

"Well," he continued, then, "it is not too late for him to keep that promise."

"But I no longer love him, father," Toinette cried, her tears getting the better of her.

"See, you make my point for me!" he exclaimed. "Just a few short weeks ago you were willing to trust yourself to him, so sure were you of your heart, and now you tell me you have changed your mind. What has made you change your mind so quickly?"

He paused, and lowered his voice. "Is it because of something that happened while you were together on the island?"

"No," Toinette whispered, miserably.

"You swear it?"

"Father, I swear it!" she cried, a little wildly. "I have done nothing wrong."

The *curé* nodded to himself, plainly relieved.

"I am overjoyed to hear you say so," he declared. "I know you would not lie to me, your father confessor, either in the confessional or out of it. But don't excuse yourself so readily, my child. Out of this rashness of yours has come enmity, bitterness; men have lost their lives; angry passions have been blown to flame; and see how miserable you are! You have much to make amends for. I understand that gossip has it that Captain Labadee has refused to marry you. Is that true, my child?"

"He has begged me to marry him," Toinette declared, indignantly. "It is I who have refused. He never loved me, or else he would have died before shaming me as he has."

"Marriage is the only way in which he can undo the harm he has done you. I

am glad to hear he realizes it. It speaks well for him. Let nothing keep you from marrying him, Antoinette! Your good name will be restored; there will be an end to gossiping."

Toinette winced. So this was his solution, too! Were they all mad? Blindly she groped for the back of her chair and drew herself to her feet. Her head throbbed crazily.

If she had to sell herself to buy their good opinion, then let them regard her as they pleased! New courage came to her, and she shook her head defiantly, like a wild thing at bay.

"No, father," she implored. "I can't marry Captain Labadee."

"But I say you must," he said sharply. "Don't think I am severe, for I am not unmindful of your happiness. You have never defied me before, and I do not expect you to defy me in this. I shall see Captain Labadee before the week is past, and your grandfather, too, and discuss the matter with them."

He arose and took Toinette's hand in his.

"Don't let this upset you," he said, conciliatingly. "Prayer will convince you of the wisdom of what I suggest."

"Cleophas is getting nervous, I see," he concluded. "Go, now, and take my blessing with you."

"But I shall never marry Captain Labadee, father!" she exclaimed, stubbornly. Her courage amazed her, and her hand trembled as she crossed herself.

The *curé* only smiled.

"We shall see, my child," he murmured; "we shall see."

XXIV

THE storm raged for the better part of the week, and it was not until the day after Christmas that Father Braire came to Muddy Creek to talk with Placide Labadee. He arrived by way of the bay instead of coming direct from town, and by that fact Antoinette Chevalier knew he had been to see her grandfather.

The *curé's* face was longer than usual. All the iron in him seemed to have come to the surface. Toinette surmised that his interview with Grandfather Chevalier was the cause.

Her own face fell as she realized that she was about to pay for keeping back from Placide any word of what Father

Braire had advised. Even then, she did not see how she could have broached the matter to him.

Labadee glanced sharply at her as he recognized their visitor. The two had been alone since noon, Amador having gone to town for flour, and Antoine to run his trap line.

"Why does the *curé* come here?" Placide asked.

It was too late to tell him the reason.

"He always comes, to every one," she answered evasively.

He smiled so grimly that she wondered if he understood what impended. Placide had been hobbling about on crutches for two days, and he thumped his way to the door and opened it as Father Braire got out of his old *burteau*.

"I'm glad to see you, captain," the priest declared. "On crutches already, eh? That's good!"

Placide nodded calmly. "I dare say you recognize them."

Father Braire's face relaxed a little, for, in truth, he did recognize them. In their time the crutches had seen service from one end of the bay to the other.

"And how are you, Antoinette?" he inquired as he placed his hat on a vacant chair.

"Very well, father," she replied, patently ill at ease.

"Well, I suppose you haven't been out of the house since Sunday. The air is bracing. Get your coat and take a turn down the creek. I want to speak to the captain."

Toinette was glad enough to escape. She caught up her coat eagerly, and was gone without another word.

The wind was cutting, but she swung along at a sharp pace, and was soon warm. Before long she was out of sight of the cabin.

Without having any definite destination, she went on and on, and in the course of an hour or more came to the bay. The wind had piled the snow up in great drifts.

Where the ice had been scoured clean, the footing was slippery. But she went on, and presently she caught a glimpse of Grandfather Chevalier's cabin.

She felt strangely relieved. She had been unconsciously guiding herself toward it for an hour.

It looked comfortable and sturdy against the winter whiteness. Smoke was rising

from the chimney. The wind caught it immediately and whipped it away.

By watching the smoke, she knew she would soon be able to determine if her grandfather were home. If he replenished the fire, the fact would be written in the sky.

She left the ice presently, where she could not help but be seen were he to glance in her direction, and moved in among the cedars. The snow was deep even there, and she went forward slowly. At last she was within two hundred yards of the cabin. The smoke had not varied.

Loup, the dog, was not in evidence. He was a chronic hunter of small game.

When another half an hour had passed without any sign of her grandfather's presence, she resolved to go boldly up to the door and try it. In the old days it had never been locked. If it were open to-day, she would steal inside, if only for a minute.

Toinette did not stop to ask herself what good could come of it. She only knew that it was home, and that it drew her on as though it had wide open arms.

She was moving forward when the door opened without warning. Dodging behind a tree, she waited, with her knees shaking.

Grandfather Chevalier came out and walked to the barn without a glance about him.

"He's going to town," Toinette whispered to herself. "He was letting the fire burn low purposely."

When he had driven away, the girl approached the cabin. She could not go in at once, so strong was her emotion at being home again. Even from a distance her grandfather had looked old and haggard, his face more hawklike than ever.

The cabin was in great disorder. Empty bottles littered the table. Remnants of food were everywhere. The fireplace had not been swept in days. In the kitchen everything was topsy-turvy.

Toinette could only shake her head pitiably as she recalled how neatly she had kept everything. She went to her own room and stood at the door with dry throat. It was a full minute before she could enter.

The disorder without had not communicated itself to her little chamber. Here everything was as she had left it.

She was so overcome that she dropped to her knees and prayed. And it was the first time since she had come ashore that she lost herself completely in worship.

Her eyes were wet when she arose, but a smile wreathed her lips. Surely, Grandfather Chevalier must expect to have her back some day, or he would not permit her room to remain as it was.

She threw off her coat and, like one possessed, set about putting the place in order. She heated water and washed the dishes, and put biscuits to bake.

Then she cut down a pair of frozen rabbits from a hook outside the door, and put them in a kettle with potatoes and drop dumplings. Over the gravy alone she spent fully a quarter of an hour.

That attended to, she cleaned the place thoroughly; got out the ashes and bottles; brought fresh wood from the shed, and even put down clean straw for old Honorable, the mare.

It was dusk when she finished. The pleasant aura of home had come back to the cabin.

She was almost tempted to light a lamp. It was the one touch needed to turn back the clock to the happy winter evenings when she had waited for him to come back from town.

She knew she could not reach Muddy Creek before darkness fell. She was not disturbed about that.

She went back to her room when she had donned her coat again. There were many things there that were dear to her.

Her eyes fell on the little ebony case on its hook above her bureau. It was opened wide, revealing two old daguerreotypes, side by side in their little gold frames—her mother and father.

She had no thought of taking it. It was hers, but it belonged here, even as she belonged.

When she had stepped outside, she did not move away at once. Here she had stood a thousand times and gazed at the bay and the great lake beyond. So she stood there now, and drew great drafts of clean, cold air into her lungs.

Eugene Malby had told her where Victor had come ashore. She let her glance run along the beach until it came to the spot, and then she could not look away.

She thought of Jules and Eli, the mate. She saw them again, not as they were on that wild, pitiless night when the Héloïse went down, but strong, laughing giants here at Joe Chevalier's cabin, with a fine, hearty contempt for life's dangers.

She thought of what the *curé* had said.

These men had died in vain, but surely the fault was not hers. It was not so much that love was weak as that passion was strong.

She had been only a pawn—and a pawn life would keep her, if it could. Even *Monsieur le Curé* had been enlisted against her.

Toinette shook her head defiantly as she faced the lake, and if she addressed any one, it was the three strong men who had gone down with the *Héloïse*.

"No," she vowed. "They shall not do this to me; I will not marry Placide Labadee. Never!"

Her grandfather returned soon after she had left. He knew at a glance that she had been there. Beside himself, he kicked chairs out of his way, and swept the dishes from the table.

"Come here, will she?" he shrieked like one possessed. "I'll show her!"

Proceeding to the kitchen, he picked up the dinner she had cooked for him, and hurled it through the window.

"I'll cook my own food!" he yelled with a curse.

He was halfway to the door, when he stopped short. The aroma of Toinette's cooking was wafted to his nostrils, and it made him tremble.

He sniffed once, and then again. His cursing fell away to an incoherent mumble, and then ceased.

He looked about him surreptitiously, as if he suspected some one was watching him. A groan broke from his lips, and the stiffness seemed to go out of his back. Reaching out with trembling hands, he caught up the empty pot and eyed it ravenously.

The odor of browning biscuits reached his hungry old nostrils. He opened the oven, and fell back before the treasure it held.

He was undone on the instant. He knew now how he missed her.

"That girl!" he cried. "Toinette, where are you?"

He searched the cabin from end to end for her. His eyes were wet, but he did not know it.

Catching up a lighted lantern, he rushed outside and hunted in the snow until he found her tracks. For a quarter of a mile he followed her, calling her name aloud, and begging her to come back to him.

But Toinette was gone. Only once did his cry reach her. It was eerie and far off. It hastened her on her way.

Placide was waiting for her. He was alone. A great sigh of relief escaped him as he beheld her.

"Where have you been?" he demanded, sharply. "For the last two hours I have worried myself sick over you, imagining all sorts of things."

"The *curé* is gone," Toinette countered, guilefully, wondering whether she should admit having been home.

"He has been gone hours," Labadee replied. "He wasn't urged to stay."

He caught her arm and made her face him.

"Why didn't you tell me?" he asked. "You knew what he came for. Was it because you thought I would say 'yes'?"

"I couldn't tell you, Placide," she answered. "I didn't want you to know. I was afraid."

"Afraid that I would say 'yes'!" He shook his head wearily. "How little you understand me, Toinette. Haven't I wronged you enough already? I love you too well to lose you forever by consenting to any such arrangement as your *curé* proposes. They shall never make you marry me. They shall never take away from me the hope that some day you may care for me again."

Toinette held her breath. There was fire in his voice again. It warmed something in her, even though she shook her head as she turned away. Perhaps it was gratitude that sent the color flying to her cheeks.

"Oh, don't turn away, little wren," he implored. "I'll do anything I can to right what I've done to you. I can't stay here at Amador's much longer; but I shall remain on the bay. You know the *curé* is not the only one who has spoken to me. There is Amador."

"It would kill me, Placide," she murmured. "They don't understand."

Amador came, then. His manner proclaimed that something was amiss.

"Antoine is not back yet?" he asked.

"He was going to Bonvouillor's to play cards to-night," Placide informed him.

Toinette got supper. Through it all Amador had nothing to say.

The hour following the evening meal had always been the most sociable one of the day. Gathered around the huge fireplace, Antoine would peel and dissect great red apples with a knife as sharp as a razor.

Amador would smoke and spin inter-

minable yarns about field and stream, and his exploits as a hunter and trapper. Placide had his tales, too; and Toinette, close to the fire, would ply her long steel needles in time with the rise and fall of their voices.

To-night Amador stared moodily into the fire, his pipe cold in his lips. Placide tried to draw him out two or three times, but without success. At last, his patience at an end, he said:

"What's the matter, Amador? Something happen in town?"

Questioned with such directness, Amador could do naught but answer.

"Sam refused to advance me any money on our skins," he explained dully.

This was so unusual as to cause Labadee, who was well versed in the trade customs of the region, to sit up stiffly. Toinette dropped her needles and stared from one to the other. She knew everybody depended on credit with Sam Drouillard to get through the winter.

"What reason did he give?" Placide asked.

"Said he was afraid of the spring market in furs."

"What bosh!" Placide exploded. "Skins are worth more every year. Has he ever failed to take a good profit? You don't believe that was the reason, Amador?"

"No," Amador muttered.

"Oh!" Toinette groaned, and got to her feet. She understood, and suddenly Placide did, too.

"It's because you have taken us in; that's at the bottom of this," he said soberly.

"He wouldn't admit it; but I guess that's it," Amador confessed.

"Well, I can get out," Placide volunteered. "I'll go at once."

"No, it's not you, captain. It's Toinette he's hitting at."

"I'll go, too!" she announced bravely. "You've been too good to me to suffer on my account. I've been here a long time as it is."

Amador started to protest, but Placide cut him short.

"I'll find a place for Toinette," he declared. "It is only right that we should go, and not be a burden to you."

"And I say no," Amador said flatly. "I asked you here, and I am not sorry I did. When your leg is well, you can go, captain, if you choose, but Toinette stays here. I've spoken to Dan La Pointe al-

ready; he is going to let me have what I need."

"But he can't pay you as much as Sam Drouillard," the girl insisted. "You cannot deceive me, Amador. I had better go."

"It's easy enough to talk of going," he scolded. "But where are you to go? Placide can find a place. But you? If the two of you would only do as I have suggested—get married—it would put an end to all this. The *cure* advises it, too."

"He was here this afternoon," Placide informed him.

"And what came of it?"

"Nothing! I told him he was wasting his time. He may mean well; I know you do. But, Amador, were you to turn us out into the snow to-night, I'd say no. I won't let you force Toinette to marry me."

"Why speak of force?" Amador demanded. He put his arm around Toinette and drew her close. "You know I would not force you to do anything, little one. It is only your happiness that I am thinking of. Since you two have discussed the matter and decided it is impossible, I shall not insist. You are welcome here as long as you will stay."

But, of course, she could not stay after this. New Year's was only a day or two away. That passed, she must leave.

"I'll be hearing from Canada soon, now," she heard Placide say as she went to her room. "I'll move into town then."

She could not sleep for a long while. Fate was closing in on her. In fancy she could feel its hand at her throat.

From her window she could see for miles across the snow. The cold stars twinkled in their blue tomb. Nothing moved. Life seemed to have gone from the earth, even as hope had gone from her.

She found escape at last. It was nothing so simple as receiving a letter from Canada. Viewed in certain ways it promised much, and then again it offered nothing to her.

But it was a means of escape. They could not take it away from her. Come what would, she always had one way out—Cleophas, the rock in the storm! There was always Cleophas Recor.

"God forgive me!" she prayed, and she cried herself to sleep.

XXV

ON the day before New Year's, Placide Labadee received his answer from Canada.

It did not come by mail, as he had expected, but in person, for there alighted from the local train south, that morning, a woman clad in such gorgeous raiment as Vienna had never seen before.

All the way down from Wyandotte and Monroe, she had held the attention and approval of the millinery salesmen returning to Toledo for the holiday. This was not to her annoyance.

She was plump and pretty, too, if one could forgive the boldness of her dark, flashing eyes. There was something intoxicating about her, in a purely earthy way. Women sensed it, for they drew away from her. But it was easy to see that she had schooled herself to interest men alone.

There was no one at the station to meet her. Xavier Drouillard was on the platform. His roving eyes discovered her before she had even stepped off the train.

He lost his poise at a glance from the charmer. Man of the world though he believed himself to be, his fancy had never let him approach such magnificent femininity as this.

He even forgot to preen himself as he stood stricken dumb, and saw her look about uncertainly. Their eyes met again, and she smiled warmly.

He thawed perceptibly at this, and, as she came toward him, he managed to doff his hat. To his surprise, she asked for Captain Labadee. Xavier raised his ears like a hound on a fresh trail.

Of course, he knew where Placide could be found. And so it was he who drove the stranger to the cabin on Muddy Creek; and although wisdom whispered that it would be more advisable for him to remain without, from the comparative safety of his cutter he missed only little of the drama that followed.

Three or four times already this day visitors had come to the cabin, seeking Amador's services for the New Year festivities. He had told them he was in no mood for fiddling, but young Esdras Bonvouillor had won him over, finally.

"Maybe my old man won't be here next year," Esdras had pleaded. "This may be his last good time."

Judging by Esdras's holiday air, the "good time" at his home had not waited for evening to begin. He insisted that Antoine return with him; there was so much yet to be done.

Antoine was not averse to this, and had Amador not his traps to look after, he, too, would have been carried off by the boisterous young man.

Thus it was that Toinette and Placide were alone when Xavier drove up. They did not go to the window to look out, thinking that only another had come seeking Amador's services.

The girl answered the stranger's knock. Her face went white as she recognized the woman whose photograph had adorned the cabin of the Héloïse. Toinette surveyed her critically, noting the fine clothes and extravagant hat. It was a cold, unfriendly appraisal.

Without resorting to reason, she hated this woman. The stranger was just as cool, for Xavier had told her a crafty thing or two.

Toinette's eyes encountered him at that moment, leering at her, gloating over her confusion. She threw her head up and stepped aside.

What right had this woman there? She remembered, then, and smiled grimly to herself. Why shouldn't she come? She was part of Placide's world.

"If you want to see Captain Labadee, he is here," she announced, and, as the woman entered, closed the door. Turning, she called to Placide.

He hobbled out of the kitchen, presently. His eyes bulged as he saw who wanted him. He groaned outright as he staggered backward.

"Maria!" he exclaimed.

Throwing out a hand, he caught himself and swayed groggily. He knew Toinette was there, watching him. How was he to explain this intrusion?

"Oh, my dear Placide!" the woman cried, and ran forward to embrace him.

He put her off angrily.

"You shouldn't have come here," he said gruffly. "When I wrote Ladouceur, I told him not to tell you. But he did, of course."

The woman drew herself up and gave him a withering glance.

"Why shouldn't I come here?" she demanded. "You were not always so cool to me, Placide Labadee!"

Toinette had no desire to overhear. But for Xavier she would have rushed from the house. At least she could go to her room. She was halfway across the floor when Placide's visitor stopped her.

"Wait, *mademoiselle!*" she said. "I didn't come all the way from Canada to be shamed before a peasant like you! Captain Labadee forgets. I loved him long before he ever saw you; and he loved me. He's my man, and I'm going to have him! Are you fool enough to think he is serious with you?"

"Captain Labadee means nothing to me," Toinette retorted, scathingly. "He is yours to do with as you please!"

The woman tried to stop her again, but Placide brushed her back.

"Go to your room, Toinette," he ordered sharply.

Through the closed door she could hear them talking excitedly. They spoke of the money for which Placide had sent. She could hear his gruff answers, and at last the woman's voice, raised pleadingly as she implored him to go back with her.

"Go with her!" Toinette yearned to shout aloud. "Go, and never come back! You belong to her!"

She beat her breast frantically in her humiliation. Why did Xavier Drouillard have to be out there to hear the awful truth? He would grin knowingly at her for the rest of her life!

An hour must have passed before she heard the outside door swing open, and saw Maria walk slowly toward the waiting cutter.

Some time after they had gone, Placide knocked at her door. She refused to answer the summons.

"I must speak to you, Toinette," he called.

"Go away, please," she answered, finally. "There is nothing to be said."

He was persistent, but he could not get her to answer again.

Amador returned at noon. From the kitchen she could hear the drone of their voices. She wondered just how much Placide was telling him. Later, she heard Amador get out the horse and sleigh.

To her surprise she saw the old man help Placide into it. Amador came back then and called to her.

"The captain has to go to Monroe for his money," he said. "I'm going to drive him to town. I'll go to Bonvouillor's on the way back. Why don't you open the door, Toinette?"

She did, and Amador found her dry-eyed and calm.

"Placide has told me," he explained.

"It was not his fault. You know how young men live when they are footloose."

"I think I understand," she replied, evenly.

"You don't mind being alone?"

"Of course not."

"Well, happy New Year, then, Toinette!" He gave her a hug. "I'll bring you something nice to-morrow."

When she was sure they were out of sight, she came to the door. She was hatless, but swathed in her heavy coat.

She ran her fingers through her hair as the wind whipped it. The cabin had become unbearably oppressive, and it was a relief to let the cold breeze fan her throbbing head.

She moved away from the cabin at last, walking rapidly. There was a hard crust on the snow, so she did not tire quickly. She knew better than to go to the bay today, for there was sure to be a crowd there already.

Usually it was the great day of the year at Grandfather Chevalier's. If for any reason he was not keeping open house, there were many others who were. Christmas, however, was a sacred day, given over to going to church and prayer.

She was back at the cabin before evening fell, tired but hungry. She got a bite to eat and built up the fires. The long shadows danced about the living room as she sat inert by the fireplace.

She was no nearer determining what she should do on the morrow than she had been when she left the cabin at noon. Indeed, she found it impossible to focus her thoughts sharply.

Eugene Malby would be back from Monroe by noon. He had offered to loan her a small sum once, enough to take her to Toledo. It would be running away. She had said they would not drive her out; how rashly she had promised herself that!

Thanks to Xavier, the whole countryside would soon know about the woman who had come to see Placide. There would be fresh laughter at her expense. Even now the two of them might be in Monroe.

She laughed bitterly at the thought. She told herself she didn't care—but she did. Labadee had hurt her, and a savage desire to hurt him in turn took possession of her.

The stranger had mocked her coarse clothes and country manners. Every time she recalled the taunt it left a fresh wound. But there was truth in what she had said.

She looked at her heavy shoes and woolen skirt, and compared them to the visitor's finery. How could a country girl have hoped to hold Placide?

Across the stillness there came the distant tinkling of sleigh bells. It brought a fresh pang of loneliness, for New Year's had ever been a time of delight to her.

It meant gay parties, good things to eat, dishes seen but once a year. Grandfather Bonvouillor would make the punch his great-grandfather had learned the trick of from the English officers in the old days at Fort Detroit. Grandfather Chevalier would match him with his spiced wine with great red apples bobbing in it.

There would be dancing, piling into bobsleds twenty strong, and dashing from one scene of gayety to another. In some cases the week would be over before the revelers returned home; eating and sleeping wherever they chanced to be.

Sometimes the sleds would overturn and pitch all out in the snow. What great good fun that was! The young men would rub snow into the girls' faces and take sly kisses before they could be fought off.

There would be singing—all the old songs. And the games—bobbing for apples, blowing feathers, finding the wishbone, which last year that foolish Papineau boy had hidden in the punch. And that clown, Flygette La Plante, doing tricks so funny that even Agathe, his wife, laughed until the tears rolled down her cheeks.

The bells were nearer now. Toinette ran to the window and peeped out. The night was bright, and down the road she saw a team coming swiftly.

They did not slacken pace until they were in front of the cabin. Then, with a flourish, the driver wheeled the horses and brought them up dancing in the yard.

"Cleophas!" she called out, although he could not hear her through the closed window.

It was a cry of utter gladness. She was alive, laughing again!

She ran to the door and threw it open excitedly.

"Cleophas!" she called again. "Happy New Year!"

He shouted back a noisy greeting.

"I'll put the team in the barn!" he announced.

"I'm glad to see you, Cleophas," she told him, when the horses had been attended to. It was so honestly said that he was

stirred out of his usual calm, and throwing his arms around her, he gave her a great hug. He was so huge and roly-poly in his bearskin coat that she rather expected him to growl at any moment.

His pockets were bulging with sweetmeats and presents. From the floor of the cutter he drew out a cane.

"For Placide," he explained. "I had old man Fiset make it. It's hickory. I wonder what Placide will say."

"Placide is not here; he has gone to Monroe."

"Gone to Monroe?" he gasped. "I knew Amador would not be here, and perhaps not Antoine—but to leave you alone on this night—"

They were inside before Toinette had fully explained Placide's absence. Cleophas looked about a little bewildered as he began emptying his pockets.

"You're too good!" the girl cried, as she unwrapped a package and held up an embroidered shawl. "That's no *habitant* shawl, Cleophas. You never got it in Vienna, I know."

"You like it?"

"I love it, Cleophas!"

She nibbled at the candies and the sugared fruit that he had brought.

"Light the lamps!" she exclaimed. "I'll change my dress. Why didn't you let me know you were coming?"

"You don't have to change your dress for me," he protested.

"But I shall. Let us make New Year's, too!"

The room was aglow when she came out again, radiant in her new shawl. She curtained before him.

"Is it not beautiful?" she demanded, coquettishly.

Cleophas's eyes warmed. He had never seen her more desirable.

"You remember that old Mme. Campeau from Wyandotte, who used to visit in Vienna?" she asked, smilingly.

She threw back her head and mimicked the good, prim lady to perfection as she paraded up and down the room.

Cleophas grinned, and they laughed together. Her gayety was not forced. She got out wine for him, and an immense bowl of apples.

"We should have pop corn, too, Cleophas. There is a bag full hanging in the barn. Come, we'll get it together, and while you pop it I'll make honey cakes."

She raced him to the barn, and held the lantern up while he got the bag down. They made such a merry time of it that they failed to hear the approach of a bob-sled full of merry-makers.

They had covered half the distance back to the house before the strains of "Brigadier" stopped them in their tracks. The next instant the sled hove into sight. It was too late to escape being seen.

Toinette did not mind having been left out of it all. Had she been asked, she would have refused to go. And yet there was something poignantly pitiful in having to face those who had ostracized her—in letting them see how well they had succeeded.

Cleophas felt it, too, but he shrugged his shoulders scornfully. Toinette tried to extinguish the lantern.

"No," he said under his breath. "Pre-tend we don't see them. What do we care where they are going?"

The sled was passing, now. Only for a second did the singing die away—just long enough for Toinette to realize that they had been seen.

Standing up in the sled, thumping his guitar, was Dave Morrin. The sled was moving too rapidly for her to recognize the others. There was no word of greeting, no friendly wave of the hand, no sign of recognition from any of them.

The sled soon passed from sight, but the singing and laughter came drifting back sharp and clear across the snow.

Cleophas's mouth was straight and grim, in his eyes the light of vengeance, for he knew what they had just done to the girl. His arms were about her as she buried her face against him, great sobs shaking her.

"Never mind, Toinette," he crooned softly. "They hoped to see you alone. They came this way to hurt you. That was Xavier driving." He raised his fists, huge as hams. "How much more can I bear from him?"

"You—you stayed away from them to be with—with me, didn't you, Cleophas?" she murmured brokenly.

"No," he lied bravely, to ease the hurt they had given her. "I wasn't asked."

"I—I don't feel so bad now!" She laughed piteously. "Both of us left out like this. I—I'm glad they saw you here."

"I wish they might always see us together." He caught her chin and made her look up at him. "I love you, Toinette. Why won't you marry me?"

She drew a great breath as her eyes searched his gaze. Slowly, she put up her hand and held it against his cheek.

"Do you really want me?" she whispered, so low that he barely heard.

"More than I can say, Toinette! Will you be my wife? I'm going to Toledo day after to-morrow. You could go with me."

Seconds passed as she stared at him, trying to read her future in his eyes.

"Yes," she answered at last, "I'll marry you, my Cleophas."

XXVI

IN the eyes of the white man's world, marriage is the great absolver of sin. It is supposed to reclaim the wicked and give pause to the wayward. Vienna proved no exception to the rule.

With surprising suddenness, Toinette Recor found herself a person of no little importance to the community. Despite the *curé's* insistence that she marry Placide Labadee, and Amador's prophecy of unhappiness unless she did, life smiled at her again.

The *curé* excused himself readily. He had insisted only that she marry, he said. He had not believed Cleophas would wed her.

Since the young blacksmith had, the good father was more than satisfied. He showed Toinette the greatest consideration, and, when visiting his parishioners, never failed to refer to her happiness and speak a word in her behalf.

Cleophas's family nodded their heads and agreed with him. Others who had felt a great indignation with her, were likewise satisfied; and before spring had fairly come, even the hardest gossip found Toinette Recor an unprofitable subject.

Father Braire journeyed to the bay to see Grandfather Chevalier. His mission had been crowned with success, for almost immediately old Joe appeared at the Recor home. Before he left, a complete reconciliation had been effected, and he had Toinette's promise to return to the bay.

She had protested that the long trip twice a day would be too much for Cleophas. But Grandfather Chevalier had insisted; and Cleophas, to please Toinette, who could not conceal her eagerness to go, had consented to the change.

Just before they moved out to the bay, Toinette met Placide Labadee, quite by accident. She understood he had been

journeying back and forth between Monroe and Vienna frequently of late. He was hobbling along on the cane Cleophas had given him, lame for life.

He swept off his hat, and, with a smile parting his lips, bowed low with his old-time grace. For a fleeting second their eyes met, and she saw with awful clarity just how irreparably she had hurt him.

He passed on, then, without a word, and left her breathless and uncertain of herself. She went home directly and locked herself in her room.

For the first time she realized how completely she had closed the door on what might have been. There was no going back now.

How vividly she recalled the stricken look of his eyes as he had stood before her. He had cared, after all!

She had gone on, day after day, engaging herself with matters of trifling importance, and refusing to admit that she was at all concerned about Placide. She knew her mistake now!

Nothing in this world or the next could have forced her to examine the state of her feeling for him. She was Cleophas's wife, and that was a barrier inviolate. But Placide Labadee had meant too much to her, had played too important a rôle in her life, to be dismissed without a thought.

It was a time of relinquishment. She knew that she had dreaded this hour. But, as often happens, when one walks in circles to avoid an ordeal, and at last is made to face it, she felt better for it.

Her gayety of the last few weeks was gone; it had been forced and unreal. She was relieved to be done with it. She knew she could go on—surer of herself than she had been.

Cleophas came home early and found her quite as usual. Two days later they moved to the bay.

Now, wherever she looked, there was work to be done. An orgy of cleaning and rearranging followed, in which Grandfather Chevalier was caught as helplessly as a fly in a spider's web. It had been her petty tyrannies that he had missed as much as anything, and he submitted with good grace to her demands.

She was up before dawn to cook breakfast for Cleophas. It was always after dark before he returned. So, for weeks, she saw him by day only on Sunday. They never failed to go to mass; but once home

from church, unfinished chores claimed them.

Marriage had already worked some subtle change in both of them. Day by day, Cleophas became more and more like his father, thrifty, even-tempered, and silent.

With soil to till, the peasant came out strongly in Toinette. Spring was upon her in earnest. The high water had receded. Fields had to be plowed; corn and potatoes planted; a truck patch made to flourish.

She did it all; toiling furiously for hours on end every day. It took something out of her, of course, and she became careless of herself in the way peasants do when their bodies are engaged in making an arduous living, when sleep follows exhaustion and pleasure means only resting.

Toil coarsened her slender hands, but it did not thicken her ankles nor make her broaden out in the way of most women. The youth that had been so markedly hers stayed with her. It was in her step and the flash of her eyes.

Even when wearied with hours in the fields, she walked with shoulders thrown back, a regal figure of a woman. There was something vital about Toinette that work could never kill.

She was always hatless. Eugene Malby saw her one day. The wind was whipping her short skirt about her legs, her hair was flying, and in her eyes was that unconquerable something to which men have always answered.

He went away, marveling to himself. And yet, he knew she had changed, even as Cleophas had changed. It was less physical than mental; and it was not peculiar to them alone.

With marriage, youth's resentment against toil and drudgery vanished. In Toinette, there was a new and strange complacency, an acceptance of life's sterner realities that had not been there before.

Toinette knew that Captain Labadee had returned to Canada. Cleophas told her. Her indifference had not been pretended. But the following day she hoed nearly twice her usual number of rows of corn and potatoes.

Grandfather Chevalier was so pleased with her that he asked her to accompany him to town. Everything was up, and doing well, so she had no excuse for refusing. It was the first time she had been in Vienna, save Sundays, since she had returned to the bay.

Cleophas was shoeing a horse as they passed the forge. Toinette waved to him. He waved back and smiled good-naturedly, but he did not leave his work. Strangely enough, Toinette did not expect him to run out to her, as he had done in the old days.

Grandfather Chevalier still traded with Sam Drouillard. As he drove old Honorable up to the hitching rack, he heard Toinette catch her breath. He glanced up, a little surprised.

"What's the matter?"

"I—I guess I'll wait for you out here, grandfather," she replied, nervously.

"Why should you do that? You come with me; Sam's all right."

"But Xavier?"

"He isn't home!"

That made a difference, of course.

"All right, then," she murmured, but shook her head regretfully.

Hilarion Navarre still clerked for Sam. He stretched his long neck and peered at them over a cracker box. A broad smile wreathed his face on recognizing Toinette. Sam was in the store, too, and he came bustling forward with all his old briskness, rubbing his hands like a money lender.

"I'll wait on them, Hilarion," he called to his clerk, and turning to old Joe and Toinette, he beamed a hearty greeting.

Toinette was so taken back that her knees wobbled.

"Well, I began to think we never would see you here again, Toinette!" Sam exclaimed. "What's the matter, Drouillard's store not good enough for you any more?"

He laughed loudly, and, winking, gave Grandfather Chevalier a great dig in the ribs.

Toinette mumbled a vague reply. He never had been so affable. Judging from his manner, the last year with all its bitterness might never have been.

"See!" Grandfather Chevalier exclaimed, when they were on their way home. "I told you Sam was all right. He is a hot-head, like me; but he is all right."

Toinette was not convinced; her memory was too long. The next afternoon she went to Muddy Creek to ask Amador to explain. He rubbed his nose and nodded sagely.

"I'll answer your question by asking one," he said. "Do you know where Xavier Drouillard has gone?"

Toinette shook her head.

"Well, he's in Canada with Placide."

"What?"

Toinette could not believe her ears. Those two together? It was incredible.

"Captain Labadee hates Xavier!" she exclaimed.

"Maybe he does," Amador agreed, provokingly, "but they left together. Sam and your grandfather are putting up the money for Placide's new boat. Xavier went along to keep an eye on the cash."

"No, no, Amador! Don't tell me my grandfather is putting up any money for Placide. Why, he never mentions his name. I know he has not forgiven him."

"He may not have forgiven him. But that isn't important. Enough that he hasn't forgotten. Your grandfather never forgets. But he loves a dollar! He'll get even with Placide, if only through using him. He knows what he is about. There's local option west of Vienna, now. That's going to mean a fortune to a few here on the bay."

"But why hasn't grandfather told me? He must know I'll find out some time."

"What you don't know doesn't hurt you," Amador declared as convincingly as if the words were his own.

In a daze, Toinette started walking toward home.

"Wait, I'll row you part of the way," Amador called out. "I'm going over to Picard's."

"Why don't you ever come to our place?" she asked, when they were seated in the boat. "Grandfather often speaks of you."

"Not until he comes here first!" Amador declared vehemently. "Joe may have his hands full before the year is out."

"Just how, Amador?" Toinette asked, struck by his tone.

"Well, Placide is the shrewdest of the lot. I have an idea he is after something more than money."

"What do you mean?" she persisted.

"Oh, nothing," and he dismissed her question with a shake of his head. "But some folks may feel the weight of Captain Labadee's displeasure yet."

XXVII

EVERY morning for a week, Toinette scanned the bay in vain for a glimpse of the schooner that was to replace the old Héloise. Other weeks followed, and no one came.

She tried to draw out her grandfather, but he put her off. The edge of her curiosity dulled with delay, until one day Cleophas informed her that Xavier Drouillard was back in Vienna.

Grandfather Chevalier went to town at once. The following day Xavier departed again as mysteriously as he had returned. Not many days later Grandfather Chevalier had the bridge repaired at Sulphur Creek.

Toinette surmised that these events were not unrelated, although her grandfather explained that, with the new bridge, Cleophas would find it much easier traveling to and from town. That was true, but if another schooner was to replace the *Héloïse*, that short road to Vienna was a necessity.

Had any doubt remained in her mind, the construction of a wharf and the repairing of the road through the woods would have removed it. And yet Placide Labadee never came.

The days grew hot. The roads lay deep in dust. Overhead the sun sailed lazily, a molten copper ingot. The corn ripened, and inland the fields of wheat turned a dull gold.

Never a ripple marred the surface of the bay. The marsh grass drooped. Blackbirds chattered noisily.

In the truck patch great red tomatoes peeked out from their leafy coverlets. Round pumpkins squatted like self-satisfied Buddhas, their round bellies exposed.

August was nearly gone already. Man had done his work, and nature now was doing hers for him. With good crops assured, the talk of the countryside drifted to the horse racing at Vienna, which annually made early September a notable time.

Every one went to the races. The entries were largely local horses, with only one or two outsiders from Toledo and Monroe and Newport. The animals were as well known to the bettors as their own children.

There was Esdras Bonvouillor's gray gelding, for instance. He had never won a race, and yet Esdras would back him year after year.

Dave Morrin would be there in his glory. He had a string of good horses; the best one a mare. She often knew the ignominy of pulling a plow, but she could pace a mile in better than 2.30.

The "hot-dog" was not yet invented,

but the "hokey-pokey" ice cream man was there; also shrewd fakers, reaping a harvest with the old "shell" game and spinning wheels which could be controlled by the operator's foot. Under the grand stand was a long bar, where Dan La Pointe's bartenders served the thirsty, as well as those who had long since lost their thirst.

Between races there were "open-air" attractions, free to all. This year Professor Cole was to make balloon ascensions every day.

How could one stay away? In every cabin on the bay plans for going were made already.

Grandfather Chevalier was as impatient as the youngest boy. For Cleophas, it meant the busiest week of the year, what with so many horses to be shod.

Toinette shared their excitement. Julie Picard and Delphine Roubideaux dropped in to show her their new hats, bought especially for the races. The next morning Toinette went to town with Cleophas, and when she came home that evening, she had a new hat also.

The day before the races were to begin, Grandfather Chevalier brought home word that Xavier Drouillard had returned again and had entered a horse.

Toinette forgot to be surprised at his home-coming. "I suppose it's that mare, Michigan Belle," she said, laughingly. "She's always last."

"Xavier has a new sulky—you know, with these pneumatic tires," Cleophas cautioned her. "It will make a difference."

"It is not fair to the others!" she exclaimed hotly.

"Why not?" Grandfather Chevalier demanded. "Is it his fault the others still use the high wheels? Anyhow, there's nothing any one can do about it."

Cleophas left at dawn the next morning, as usual. Before noon, Grandfather Chevalier was off. Saturday would be the big day, however, and Toinette had decided to go then.

She knew Cleophas and her grandfather would be present every afternoon. It never occurred to her to question the justice of such an arrangement.

And yet she found it difficult to put her mind to her work that afternoon. A light wind had sprung up, and several times she thought she caught the distant strains of a band.

Toward evening the children gathered

along the beach, hoping to catch a glimpse of the balloon. Toinette began to watch, too, knowing the wind would bring it toward the bay.

The children discovered it first, as their wild shouting announced. As they watched, the parachute dropped like a plummet, then opened, and gracefully settled down toward the earth. The balloon leaped upward, careening on its side, black smoke pouring from it in a cloud.

"It's coming this way!" the children cried.

It was very exciting.

"It's coming down!" a boy shouted a few minutes later.

The big bag began to drop rapidly. Soon it collapsed completely, and, shriveling up, it hung against the sky for a second, a big dirty rag. It shot earthward then, a fine trail of smoke following it.

Toinette had been completely absorbed. She was halfway to the cabin before she became aware of a rig dashing madly down the road. She saw at a glance that it was Cleophas.

His face was white. He leaped to the ground before the horses had come to a stop, and ran toward her.

He did not have to speak to tell her that something terrible had happened. His manner proclaimed the fact as vividly as words could have done.

He caught her. She saw there was blood on his shirt. She fought her way out of his arms.

"What is it?" she cried.

Cleophas groaned and dropped his head.

"Your grandfather—" he began.

"He's hurt? He's—" She paused to read his eyes. "Oh-h-h!" she groaned. "Cleophas, *he's dead!*"

Slowly, Cleophas nodded his head. Toinette's hands flew to her mouth, as if she would force back the words she had just uttered.

"A train hit him—a Michigan Southern train. He must have been asleep—you can see so far at that crossing. He was drinking all afternoon. I told Dan not to let him have any more. I suppose he got it in town. They're bringing him here now."

Cleophas led her inside the cabin. He was a boy again, tender and gentle with her.

"Was it you who found him?" she gasped.

"No, I came along just after it happened; but a crowd was there already. Some blame the old mare. I don't. She's almost blind, but she knew that crossing. She stopped, like as not. In his sleep he must have yanked the reins and sent her ahead."

"She was killed, too?"

"No, Honorine is all right."

Flyette La Plante knocked and came in, looking very solemn for all of his holiday-making red tie and celluloid collar.

"It's too bad, Toinette," he said, huskily. "I guess it would be better for you to go into the kitchen until we bring him in. M. Grimaud will be here to-night. You wait until he comes before you see your grandfather, eh?"

She nodded, for she understood.

The news spread rapidly, and all evening neighbors, near and distant, came with a word of consolation. The *curé*, and M. Grimaud, the undertaker, with his white gloves and long black wagon, came together, as so often was the case.

Father Braire's presence brought a great sense of peace to Toinette. He lighted his candles and placed them beside the dead, and the dead seemed no longer so far away from the living.

He prayed, and his mellow Latin phrases hallowed the air. The Divine Father seemed to draw near. As His spirit hovered over the cabin, Toinette felt again, with all the faith of her childhood, the *curé's* greatness.

The following day but one, they bore Grandfather Chevalier to the little cemetery west of Vienna.

Through it all Toinette moved rather uncertainly. Grandfather Chevalier had gone to town alive and well; and they had brought him home dead. It was a fact, and yet she found it difficult to comprehend. Even on the way to the cemetery, she caught herself thinking of him as still among the living.

The delusion stayed with her through the days which followed, and often, when in the fields, or busy about the cabin, she found herself about to appeal to him in regard to some matter or another. It left a fresh hurt always.

XXVIII

GRANDFATHER CHEVALIER left no other heir but Toinette. The cabin was hers,

now, as well as all his marshland and bank savings.

She knew nothing about the law, nor did Cleophas; so they called in Phileas Le-roux, the notary public. He spoke so profoundly on the intricacies of settling an estate that Toinette felt that whatever fee he charged would be less than enough.

A few days later, Phileas came to the bay. He had found Placide Labadee's note for fifteen hundred dollars among Grandfather Chevalier's papers.

Toinette and Cleophas looked at each other. The note told its own story.

Phileas was somewhat put out at their lack of enthusiasm over his news. He had come in a jubilant mood.

Couldn't they appreciate such a wind-fall? Especially since Sam Drouillard, to whom he had mentioned the matter, had offered to take up the note for Captain Labadee.

"You see, Toinette, how hard I am working for you?" he queried. "Fifteen hundred dollars is a handsome sum. This may not be all, either. If you will take my advice, you will accept Mr. Drouillard's generous offer—I prefer the cash, always."

"We'll think it over," Cleophas answered for Toinette. "I may see you again to-morrow."

When Phileas had left, Cleophas spoke frankly.

"There is the wharf," he said. "Who does that belong to? If Sam Drouillard wants to take up this note, let him come to you. Placide may have had some cash as well as the note from the old man."

"There'd be a receipt for it; you know how grandfather was with money. I wouldn't take the Drouillards' side against Placide," she went on, after a moment. "Placide might not want us to do this."

Cleophas snapped his fingers.

"They're as thick as thieves. You needn't worry on that account. But let us wait."

That evening Sam Drouillard came in person.

He disavowed any claim to the wharf. He offered, however, either to rent or buy it.

"I'll give you a fair price for it," he said. "I'd have to have the land that goes with it."

"I couldn't sell that," Toinette replied. "It isn't worth much, I know, but I couldn't sell it."

"I'm not anxious for it. I'll give you five dollars a month for the use of the wharf and the road. It'll help out a little bit. Now as for cash—I don't believe the captain has had a cent from your grandfather. When I spoke to Phileas about buying the note, I thought only to help you. You knew about the note, eh?"

"Well—no."

"I hardly thought you did. Your grandfather was peculiar, you know. I dare say you surmise what the money was used for."

"I think I do," Toinette replied.

"Well, when I went into this venture with your grandfather and the captain—it was my idea—it looked profitable. But its success depended on Joe. Now that he is gone, I am not so sure we'll make money. The three of us had certain ideas; we knew what we wanted to do. Now you are our partner—and you may not always agree with us. If that happens, we all lose. So, you see, in offering to buy the note, I am thinking of myself, too."

As soon as Sam established a selfish motive for his offer, Cleophas's antagonism vanished. Old Sam could not be blamed for wanting to protect himself.

Without realizing it, deep in his heart Cleophas was averse to having Toinette connected with any business that concerned Placide. The feeling was strong enough to place him on Sam's side.

In due time the money was turned over to Toinette. The possession of so huge a sum, quite beyond her dreams, worked no change in either Cleophas or herself. Both worked as hard as ever.

She got in the potatoes and corn; canned great quantities of tomatoes; dried beans and peppers. Cleophas had the winter's wood to gather and split.

Days crept by. Quail called from the stubble. The winds sharpened as if already testing their strength for the storms to come.

Toinette never wholly threw off her feeling of loneliness. She knew Cleophas was worrying about her, and for his sake she tried to appear happy and contented. But he came home early one evening and found her in tears.

"Let us move back to town," he suggested. "It's too lonely here for you, Toinette."

"I'd be more lonely in town," she murmured. "I couldn't leave the bay."

"Well, we'll drive over to Monroe after mass next Sunday," he suggested. "The trip will do you good. I'll send word to my Aunt Philomene to expect us."

With what longing had she often contemplated a trip to Monroe! It had always seemed quite unattainable, and yet, here was Cleophas suggesting it quite as casually as if he were asking her to go to mass.

Sunday was only two days away. She arose early the next morning. The weather had turned warm. The sky was cloudless, and over the water and distant hills a blue haze hung lazily.

"Indian summer has come at last," Cleophas announced. "Time to get in the hay!"

When he had left, Toinette packed her lunch basket and got out old Honarine and the mowing machine. Their marsh hay grew wild, of course, a patch here and a half acre there. At times that day Toinette was near enough to Muddy Creek to see Amador's cabin.

She had often done much harder work, but the day was hot and the hay dry. Before evening she was thoroughly tired.

Cleophas had returned before she got back home. He was standing on the beach, watching a small boat come ashore.

Toinette's eyes leaped beyond him to the open bay. There a schooner rode the lazy swells as gracefully as a swan, her white paint shimmering in the setting sun.

"It's Placide!" she gasped, and, throwing down the reins, leaped to the ground and ran forward four or five steps before she caught herself.

The small boat had been beached. Men leaped out and pulled it beyond reach of the water. A figure, tall and upright, detached itself from the others and tramped toward her across the wet sand.

It was Placide — lame, but unchanged for all that. His head was held high, and he was as swaggering a figure as ever he had been.

Toinette trembled and glanced at herself, hating her dishevelment and broken-down shoes and faded dress. But there was no escape for her, now.

Placide paused to shake hands with Cleophas. The next second he was bowing before her. Sam had written him about her grandfather. Dumbly, she heard him say he was sorry for her.

All the while, however, they scrutinized

each other, and her blood raced through her veins. Did he find her changed? Did he suspect the secret which only she and Cleophas knew?

"She's a fine boat," Cleophas said.

"Yes! But no better than the Héloïse. I hope she proves as stout."

He asked Toinette to fetch her grandfather's long glass. When she brought it he bade her read the name painted on the stern of his new vessel.

"A-n-t-o-i-n-e-t-t-e," she spelled out, letter for letter.

"Your grandfather insisted on that. It was to have been his surprise for you."

"It's beautiful, Placide." She asked him to stay for supper, but he borrowed a horse and rig from Cleophas and went to town immediately.

Toinette got the meal ready. She could not conceal her excitement. Cleophas noted it, and said nothing. The dishes washed, she changed her dress, and came out and sat beside him on the bench outside the cabin door.

"Should we have spoken about the note?" she asked rather timidly at last.

"Sam will tell him." His tone was almost gruff.

Placide did not return. That night there was a great deal of activity at the wharf. In the morning the Antoinette was gone.

The following week, Placide came again. It got to be quite as common to see the Antoinette riding at anchor just before evening as it had once been to see the Héloïse.

That first meeting had found Toinette unprepared. She was not caught again — a ribbon in her hair, a gay sash, her best shoes!

Cleophas knew. He came to associate them with the arrival of the schooner, even as he did her heightened color and fluttering hands.

If Placide stopped, it was for no more than a word. And yet Cleophas grew to hate him. He suffered, and he could not give his suffering articulation.

XXIX

WINTER came, growling and fuming as of old. It brought a son to Toinette. They called him Etienne, after his paternal grandfather.

His coming left her busy enough. She lavished all her store of love on him, and won a strange and abiding sense of contentment in return.

Azalma came just before the New Year, to invite them to her place.

"Captain Labadee is back in Vienna," she informed Toinette before she left, and glanced at her furtively.

Toinette nodded. "So Cleophas told me," she lied, wondering just what Azalma had hoped to read in her eyes at this news.

"Folks say Sam has found his new partner a hard nut to crack," she ran on.

"I guess they've made money," Toinette replied.

Azalma threw up her head. She had not expected to find Toinette so willing to discuss Placide. "They're welcome to all they make," she said, tartly.

Toinette smiled to herself. A few days later she encountered Placide at the store. The baby was in her arms. Placide raised his hands to take him, but the baby drew back.

Placide's face flushed, and a strange expression flitted across his eyes.

"Don't be afraid of me," he smiled. Then: "He's a fine boy, Toinette." He put out his finger and touched the little fellow's cheek. "Hasn't Sam something I can buy him?"

Sam came forward, grinning broadly. "What do you think of him, eh?" he demanded of Placide.

Toinette thought they seemed on the most amiable terms. Sam squandered a quarter of an hour helping Placide select a toy for the baby.

Cleophas appeared none too well pleased when she related the incident to him.

"We ought to give Dan La Plante a little of our trade," he grumbled. "He gives me all his work."

"Why, of course, if you say so," Toinette agreed.

Thereafter, Toinette seldom went into Drouillard's store.

One afternoon in March, Cleophas's father drove up to the cabin. It was unusual to see him there at such an hour, and Toinette was alarmed immediately.

"Nothing to get excited about!" the old man exclaimed. "That stallion of Ed Lavigne's kicked Cleophas this noon. We took him over to my house so he could lie down. It'll be better if he stays there tonight. I came out to tell you so you wouldn't worry."

"Is he hurt?" she demanded breathlessly. "Tell me!"

"Hurt?" old Etienne echoed derisively.

"Of course not! A horse couldn't hurt Cleophas. He's been kicked a dozen times."

Toinette and the baby went back to town with him. Cleophas seemed to be resting easily.

"I'm all right," he told her. "I'll be up to-morrow."

But he never shod another horse. He lay for a week, growing worse steadily, before Toinette could convince his father that they should send for a doctor.

When Dr. Morrin came, from Toledo, he shook his head. He called in other doctors. Day after day they came, and always they shook their heads. Maybe he would get well; maybe he wouldn't. They couldn't tell.

Spring came. Toinette went to the bay by day to do the planting, and returned to Vienna at night to watch over Cleophas. He seemed to grow no worse now. But he could not get well.

The days grew warmer, and Dr. Morrin approved of Toinette's suggestion that it would be better to move Cleophas to the bay.

Summer passed rapidly. Before it was over, the large sign above Drouillard's store came down. A new one was put up, and it read *Drouillard and Labadee*. Azalma told Toinette that Sam was building an apartment house in Toledo with the money he was making. Xavier was looking after it for him.

Toinette no longer took Azalma's gossiping to heart, and yet it was true enough that Sam was seldom in Vienna any more. At such times as he appeared, he was more prosperous and businesslike than ever.

He closed the great house which Toinette had often regarded with secret longing, and which Dan La Pointe had always ridiculed. The once closely-cropped lawn now grew knee-high. The iron lion which had long squatted so peacefully in the front yard, took on new animation, and, from the road, appeared to be skulking through a sea of waving greenery.

The hottest day of the year came that September. Toinette would lug Cleophas to the door and let him lie there, fanned by the light breezes from the bay.

It was hard for her—doing all the work in the fields and caring for the baby and him. Cleophas was not a good patient. He lost his placidity and became morose and sharp-tempered with her.

Toinette made excuses for him, and never lost patience, telling herself his illness was to blame. But it was something more than the despair of not being able to get well that was eating into Cleophas Recor's soul.

Eugene and Amador came over several times to help her. But they had their own work to do.

At regular intervals, the Antoinette arrived at evening and vanished before dawn. Placide often stopped at the cabin for a word with them or to leave some trinket for the baby.

Cleophas greeted him with growing coldness that culminated, finally, in studied hostility. Labadee felt Cleophas's antipathy and distrust long before Toinette was conscious of it. Inexpressible embarrassment came to her with the realization. After that she found it impossible to meet his eyes.

Placide did not stop again. If he caught sight of either Cleophas or her, he would wave a greeting with his hand—that was all. And yet that simple gesture fortified Toinette. If her courage ebbed low, and it seemed she could not go on, she had only to see him come ashore and stand for a brief second, hat in hand, looking for her, to be sustained.

At ten months, her baby was big and strong; already resembling her, and giving evidence of having inherited her fire. As all young mothers know, her affection for him grew even as he grew.

When she had work to do in the fields, she packed him into a basket and took him along. It was no unusual sight to see her at one end of the field, singing to him at the other end.

Before the month was out she awakened one night to find blood streaming from Cleophas's mouth. Screaming, she ran all the way to Amador's for help.

Dr. Morrin came soon after daylight. He was very grave. Amador and Eugene, Azalma and Agathe La Plante, and a few others came and stood about expectantly.

Under the physician's ministration Cleophas rallied slightly. At noon, however, Dr. Morrin told Toinette to send for the *curé*. All bowed their heads, for this was equivalent to pronouncing a sentence of death.

Eugene dashed madly to town. He had been gone only a few minutes when Cleophas lapsed into unconsciousness. The

end was nearer than even the doctor had supposed.

In his last few minutes, Cleophas seemed to throw off his suffering and care, and again become the boy he had been. A smile wreathed his worn face.

He groped blindly for Toinette. She caught his hand and held it until it began to grow cold.

Azalma and Agathe led her outside and walked up and down the beach with her. She knew Cleophas was dead: she had seen him die, day by day, for weeks. Where there had been something incredible about her grandfather's death, there was a horrible certainty about Cleophas's passing.

And so, again the *curé* and his candles; again M. Grimaud.

Azalma met Eugene a few days after the funeral. They spoke of Toinette.

"She'll move to town, now," Azalma declared. "She couldn't stay in that place any more."

"Why not?"

"It would drive her crazy."

Eugene shook his head.

"No," he ventured. "I don't believe Toinette will leave the cabin. Why should she?"

"She has money to move into town if she wants to."

Eugene smiled to himself. He understood Azalma perfectly. He might have told her that neither money nor the lack of it would have anything to do with Toinette's staying on the bay. But then, Azalma would hardly have understood.

Of course, Toinette had no thought of giving up the cabin. The old place was peopled with memories for her—gay as well as sad—many of which time would never lay.

Almost two weeks passed before the Antoinette appeared again. Toinette saw her standing outside at evening. The wind failed completely before sunset, so it was dark before the schooner dropped anchor. A few minutes later, Placide Labadee came ashore.

Toinette was watching him from the shelter of her window. She wondered if he would stop. She knew Hilarion must have written him about Cleophas's death.

A young moon shed its vibrant light upon the beach. She saw Placide stand on the wharf for long, long minutes, staring at the cabin. There was something in his atti-

tude that said he knew. He replaced his hat and straightened up.

Even at such a distance it was plain to see that he had reached a decision. The next instant he was striding briskly away from the wharf.

Toinette caught her breath. She knew he could not see her, hidden by the black shadows of her room. And yet, there was something momentous in every step he took toward her.

He had covered half the distance to the cabin when he slowed his pace. He took another dozen steps, then stopped; and having stopped, could not go on again. His determination ran away from him. He sighed heavily. Toinette heard distinctly.

Her heart missed a beat. He was so near that it seemed she would have had only to whisper his name to bring him to her side. He stood uncovered with bowed head, the moonlight touching his hair.

She saw him nod as he communed with himself—regretfully, she thought. Raising his arms, he held them out, as though he actually saw her, and then, turning, began to walk away.

She could have called to him—even then; it was not too late. But she did not speak. Her eyes were wet, but not a sound passed her lips. How could she have spoken?

XXX

BEFORE winter set in again, the sign on what had once been the establishment of Drouillard came down, and a newer one went up. It read: *P. Labadee and Company*. The company was mythical. As Amador had prophesied, local option west of Vienna had proved profitable for some.

Xavier Drouillard and his father came to town only at long intervals. Some said they were not so well off as they pretended. A tale from Toledo had it that several of Sam's investments had not turned out as he expected. He was even quoted as saying that he was sorry he had given up the store.

Those in a position to know said he had been forced out. He had needed cash. Placide had supplied it, and dictated the terms on which the loan was made. There had been a second and a third loan, and what remained to Sam of the store business had been put up as security.

The day came, as it has a habit of doing, when the notes fell due. Sam found

himself unable to make good. To his everlasting chagrin, he found himself appealing for time to one whose heart had turned to stone as far as he was concerned.

It was a bad half hour for Sam. When he would have begged for mercy, Placide Labadee reached back into the past and confronted him with memories whose fangs were sharp with long waiting.

There was no great surprise when Sam's house changed hands. It was in Placide's name now.

"I guess he got it cheap enough," Dan La Pointe declared to his cronies.

"He wouldn't have bought it, otherwise," they agreed.

No one ascribed any sentimental reason to his purchasing the place. Only Toinette wondered.

Painters came. The house and lawn were put in order. Vienna waited for Placide to move in. He disappointed his neighbors, for he continued to dwell in his rooms over the store.

Month followed month, and the big house remained empty. Summer and fall and winter all ran together. If a gutter needed repairing or the lawn cutting, it was attended to at once; but the house never had a tenant.

It became an object of wonder. Dan La Pointe found it more intriguing than ever. He spoke to Toinette about it. She shook her head; she didn't know anything about it.

She seldom saw Placide. She traded entirely with Dan; it was easier than facing Captain Labadee.

The years threw themselves at Toinette. People took sick; others died. Placide got rich. The Antoinette came no more; he was beyond need of that dangerous business any longer.

She seldom permitted herself to think of him. But then—one does not have to think of an ache to be aware of it. A living was to be made—that was ever before her. But neither her dreams nor her youth slipped away with the passing years.

Little Etienne passed from babyhood to boyhood. At five he was playing such pranks on her as she, at his age, would never have dreamed of visiting on her grandfather.

Other boys of his years along the bay were becoming interested in guns and traps and boats. Etienne was no different; he wanted to hunt and fish, too.

So, in lieu of a father, Toinette became his mentor, scouring the woods and creeks on strange adventures. It was good for her. It kept her young and close to him.

At rare intervals, Eugene Malby came and sat on the beach with her, watching the changing lights over the water. He made her see beauty that she felt, but could not express. He spoke of distant places, and painted glowing pictures of great ladies and gentlemen.

It satisfied a craving for something which she could not define. The walls of her world seemed to move back, and she lost her feeling of futility.

The *curé* came regularly. He was more rotund than ever. His face seemed too ruddy for good health. He spoke well of Placide.

"I never see him at mass," she murmured dryly.

A curious twinkle came into the *curé's* eyes, and he looked down the length of his nose.

"No," he admitted, "but he is very liberal. And I have found him an excellent judge of the best Chartreuse. But, speaking seriously, Toinette, I'll win him back yet."

October was still a month away when engineers with surveying instruments appeared on the bay. Close on their heels came Sam Drouillard. His pockets were lined with cigars. He had a noisy greeting and slap on the back for every one he met.

He made a great to-do about being home again. To his awed listeners he explained that he was going to build a summer resort on the bay.

He pictured hotels and bathing beaches and great crowds of visitors so enthusiastically that men and women turned away, wondering if he had lost his mind. When he offered thirty-five dollars an acre for land, under water half the year, they were sure of it. But there was money in his pocket, and, crazy or not, they accepted his offer.

He came to see Toinette. He told the same story to her.

"They laugh at me now," he declared. "But wait! Before I'm through you won't know this place!"

They were standing outside the cabin. He stepped back and viewed the immediate landscape critically.

"I could build a hotel here, right on this spot. Where could I find a better place?

There's the beach. There isn't a better one anywhere! I tell you, before I'm through I'll have docks there. You'll see steamboats landing thousands of people every day from Toledo."

Just where all the money was to come from for these great improvements remained a mystery. Even Sam seemed to be rather vague on this point.

Toinette was skeptical, of course. But Sam offered to pay her in cash as he had the others.

Thirty-five dollars an acre seemed a great price for land that could produce nothing better than a scant crop of marsh hay. She had eighty acres, or more.

Maybe she could let him have part of it. She would have money to send Etienne to school at Monroe, then.

But Sam shook his head. "No, Toinette, I've got to have it all. Why do you want to keep the cabin—it's falling apart."

He grew very confidential.

"Listen," he whispered, although no one was within a quarter of a mile of them, "I'm going to make you a special price. I always was a good friend of your grandfather; I want to do the right thing by you. I'll give you thirty-two hundred dollars for the place. You'll be fixed for life. If you want to stay on the bay, you can buy a few acres beyond Eugene's place and build a new cabin. It's just as good land as this."

"I'd have to keep the cabin," she insisted. "It is *home*."

Sam came up to thirty-five hundred, but she still said no. He switched to tactics of another sort.

"All right, you keep your place," he said. "I don't need it; I can buy plenty of land."

He started to get in his buggy. Toinette wondered if she were not making a mistake, after all.

"You'll be on the bay to-morrow?" she asked, wavering.

"I may," Sam answered, without encouragement to her.

"I may change my mind," she admitted frankly.

"Think it over. If I have time, I'll see you to-morrow."

He drove away, convinced that before another twenty-four hours passed he would have the place.

The talk on the bay that night concerned only Sam's scheme. Three or four neigh-

bors dropped in to find out what Toinette had done.

They had sold, and were glad of their good fortune. She went to bed wondering if Sam would come back in the morning.

But morning brought Placide Labadee. He came at a gallop, more concerned than ever she had seen him.

He ignored the fact that he had not been there in years; that time had made them almost strangers. Without wasting a word on formalities or explanations, he wiped out the intervening years for her, too.

"Have you sold the place, Toinette?" he demanded as soon as he entered the cabin.

"No," she managed to say, although her surprise at seeing him tightened her throat.

"Thank God!" he sighed with relief.

She noticed how he limped as he walked across the room and sat down. She found him greatly changed. There was less of the sea about him than there had been.

There was new authority in his voice. He was handsomer, too. She had never seen him so richly dressed.

She noted his stiffly starched white cuffs with their gold links, his brocaded waistcoat and embroidered scarf.

He was now in reality not unlike the grand seigneurs whom Eugene had described so graphically. She thought the wild, untamable light in his eyes had died down, but it flamed anew as she related her conversation with Sam.

"He'll come to-day," Placide declared. "If I know anything, he'll come before noon. When he does, you tell him you have decided not to sell. Offering you thirty-five hundred dollars!" he exclaimed, contemptuously. "Why, you'll get thirty-five thousand, not hundred!"

Toinette gasped, so convincing was he. She could not comprehend such a huge sum. And yet, now that he was there, selling at any price no longer seemed the most important thing in the world.

"Then there is something to all this talk?" she asked, evenly.

"Of course! The Toledo Traction Company is going to build an electric railroad out here. This idea of making the bay a pleasure resort is theirs, not Sam Drouillard's. He got wind of it. He bought some land, I know. If you had said yes, the traction company would have had to deal with him, and at his own price,

for almost the whole right of way from here to Halfway Creek. The beach is what they need. It's yours, and they'll pay high for it."

Toinette held her breath. She was glad Placide did not know how close she had come to selling.

"You won't have to sell the cabin. They will buy what you'll let them have," he assured her. He looked around the room. "You keep it well," he said. "Nothing has changed—not even you."

Toinette felt the blood pounding in her cheeks. She saw him reach out and pick up a little pewter pitcher from a shelf in back of his chair. He fingered it tenderly.

"It must have been ten years ago or more that I brought you this little pitcher," he remarked, musingly.

"All of that," she murmured.

Now that the conversation had taken a personal turn, she found it twice as hard to appear at ease.

Placide appeared to be in no hurry to leave. He spoke of this one and that, of little Etienne and his schooling, of the old days there at Joe Chevalier's.

He reached for his hat at last. As he got to his feet he started to speak, then paused, as if searching for words. They reached the door before he made another attempt.

"About selling the place," he said slowly; "why don't you let me take care of that for you, Toinette. Have you faith enough in me to trust me with it?"

He might have had the heart out of her body had he but asked. And still she found it possible to say that she couldn't ask him to devote his time to the sale.

"It doesn't matter how much time it takes," he declared. "I want to do this—I want to get every cent I can for you."

She was so anxious not to appear eager to accept his offer that she made him ask again before she gave her consent.

As he was leaving, he raised her hand to his lips. She felt him tremble, and he looked away and closed his eyes. She saw the hand holding his hat tighten until the knuckles were white.

Neither spoke. The moment transcended words.

Etienne came in a few minutes after Captain Labadee had left. He found his mother in tears.

"Why are you crying, mother?" he asked.

"Oh, because I'm so happy!" she exclaimed. "So happy, my son!"

She caught him up, and hugged and kissed him madly.

What a good excuse—acting as her agent—Placide had for coming again! It came to be a familiar sight to see him driving his blooded mare down the dirt road which led to the bay.

Old women whispered among themselves; the young ones smiled; the *curé* nodded knowingly. Eventually everything worked out its own solution. What a wise Providence!

Before long, Placide announced that he had closed with the railway company for the large sum he had promised. Immediately, a small army of men armed with plows and scrapers appeared, and set about changing the face of the earth.

Placide's visits did not stop with the sale of the place. Indeed, he came more frequently. In October, when the harvest moon hung low over the water, Toinette and he would sit on the beach, speaking only seldom, dreaming dreams, in a vast contentment just from being together.

The time came when he spoke to her of the great house in Vienna, just as Xavier had done, and Xavier's father. He told her it was hers, that he had bought it for her—the house she had always wanted.

"It's been waiting nearly four years for you, Toinette," he said wistfully, his eyes on the horizon, as though out there he saw the ship of his dreams making port at last.

She pressed her cheek against his.

"Has it been that long, Placide?" she whispered.

He drew her close and kissed her tenderly, reverently.

"We might have been happy so long ago," he told her.

She shook her head.

"No, it had to be this way. Don't you see, Placide?"

They were married that fall, and the big house welcomed them, but they kept the cabin on the bay long after the electric cars came, and mechanical pianos ground out ragtime tunes for overdressed girls and vapid-looking boys.

Summer cottages began to line the beach. Merry-go-rounds, dance halls, and slot machines rubbed elbows.

Summer visitors knew Toinette and Placide by sight. If either was seen working about the cabin, the sightseers said it was only what you could expect from such people. It was the peasant coming out in them. They had to dig in the earth every so often.

Maybe that was the reason.

THE END

I WILL REMEMBER YOU

I WILL remember you—

I may in later days stand at the brink

Of Lethe, but I will not drink;

Though grief entreat me with unending pain

I will not dip into the stream.

I will not drain

The cup oblivion. For yet

Within the dark would gleam

Your eyes—and I would not forget.

I will remember you—

There were no darkneses in darkest space

So heavy, but I still could trace

Your star—that trails its light through all my skies;

Yourself—of passionate memory!

No day could rise

Whose brilliancy would render

A veil across your star, or dim for me

Its perihelion splendor.

Dear love, however long it be,

I will remember.

Thalun Eames

At the End of the Rope

A SENSATIONAL CHAPTER IN THE HISTORY OF THE REV.
VINEGAR ATTS'S MINISTRY AT THE SHOOFLY
CHURCH IN TICKFALL

By E. K. Means

"WHUT ails you, Vinegar?" Skeeter Butts demanded, as the Big Four of Tickfall assembled under the chinaberry tree for their morning conference. "You looks all swelled up, like a poisoned pup."

"I is swole up," Vinegar replied, while his thick lips pouted, his eyes projected, and creases furrowed his brow.

Vinegar was a man of whom the Japanese would say that "God gave him a forehead." In fact, his intellectual brow extended clear to the back of his neck. He combed his head with a towel. Now he mopped the perspiration from it with a red-spotted bandanna kerchief.

"Dar ain't room fer two nigger preachers in dis town, an' dar is now one too many here," Vinegar lamented. "Of co'se, dis here new feller says he's jes' a lecturer, but I'm on to all dem tricks. He acks to me like he's preachin'."

"I moseyed out to hear him las' night," Figger Bush remarked, his coal-black face aglow with interest, and the thick wool standing up on his head, so that he looked like something scared and ready to run. "Dat Socrates High G. Dinks is shore a bull-roarer of a speaker. He made my years burn inside."

"Bull is de right word," Vinegar growled. "He's done butted in whar he don't belong, an' all his words he speaks is bull."

"I wus kinder pleased wid him myself," Pap Curtain, a yellow, monkey-faced man, said in his snarly voice. "It was a change of tone from Vinegar, an' I liked de change."

"A little change is good," commented Skeeter Butts, the jelly bean of Tickfall; "but pusson'ly I always prefers Vinegar

Atts to do my preachin'. Ef you gib Vinegar two sour lemons, he kin preach louder dan any man in de worl'."

"I kin, I shorely kin, fer a fack," Vinegar admitted frankly, with a grateful glance at his friend. "Eve'ybody dat sees me, says, 'Dar go de greatest preacher whut is.'"

"Of co'se," Pap Curtain agreed. "We ain't confessin' dat Vinegar ain't great. Me, I'm de greatest gravedigger whut is. Vinegar is de greatest preacher, but Socrates High G. Dinks is de newest, an' dat's all dar are to it."

"He's so new he's plumb fresh an' green," Vinegar grumbled. "Look whut he done! He come to town widout axin' nobody's by-yo'-leave, an' widout sayin' peep-little-chick to nobody. He opened up dat ole tabernacle at de camp ground, started whut he calls a co'se of lectures, an' is misleadin' all de people."

"Vinegar figgers dat anybody whut fol-lers any yuther leader excusin' his own self is bein' misled," Figger snickered.

"Dey is!" Vinegar snapped. "Good gosh, ain't I been de nigger preacher in Tickfall fer twenty year? I ain't gwine let dis little upstart start up an' start somepin dat mought git de people—started!"

"Ef yo' self-starter makes a few mo' starts, you'll shore git to gwine," Skeeter Butts laughed.

"Whut I craves is to git dis Socrates High G. Dinks started," Vinegar snapped.

"He's off to a good start already," declared Pap Curtain. "Mighty nigh a millyum niggers wus out at de ole tabernacle las' night."

"I don't crave to start him in town," Vinegar explained. "I wants to start him out of town."

"Us will he'p you, ef you say de word an' tell us how," Skeeter assured him. "I ain't run a nigger fer a long time, an' I shore will expe'unce joy at de chance."

"I cain't dope out no way to chase him," Vinegar lamented. "Whut troubles my mind is dat he done ignore me complete. He preaches an' passes de hat, an' he don't ax me to he'p him at all. He's done come to town jes' when I'm leavin' to cornduck a meetin' in Shongaloon."

"He ain't ack polite todes you," agreed Pap Curtain. "How come you ain't tole me dat befo'?"

"My mind is bothered, an' I ain't think straight an' strong," Vinegar sighed.

"Ef you say de word, we'll beat him up," Figger Bush remarked, valiantly. "I done fit eve'y kind of man in my life excusin' a preacher, an' I ain't too proud to knock de stuffin' out of one of dem, ef somebody will be dar to hold him when I hit him."

"When I fights a preacher, I'm gwine pick a little one," Skeeter Butts laughed. "You see, de Lawd is on deir side."

II

At this point the discussion was interrupted by the appearance of a young negro who came around the corner of the building and stopped beside them. He was a saddle-colored man, with the muscular equipment of a workman who had spent several years of his life hauling logs out of the swamp with an ox team.

"Mawnin', Sandy!" Vinegar greeted him. "Come in among us, son, an' set down. Take a chair—take two chairs!"

"Ain't got time to set down an' favor my foots," Sandy grinned. "I come to town to buy me a pair of weddin' licenses, an' I come by here to ax you to come out to Shongaloon to-morrow night an' wed-lick us wid de ceremony."

"I'll be dar, Sandy," Vinegar assured him cordially. "I starts a distracted meetin' in dat town to-morrer, an' it 'll be convenient to marrify you. I shore needs a fi'-dollar weddin' fee. Who you choosin' as a boss till death does you-alls part?"

"Pawnee Yellup," Sandy told him.

"Who?" Vinegar howled.

"Pawnee Yellup," Sandy repeated.

"Hell-up!" Skeeter exclaimed, throwing up his hands as if about to faint. "Whut you say dat damsel's name is?"

"Yellup," Sandy reiterated.

"Good Lawd!" Pap Curtain whooped. "Is you real shore you ain't mistooked about whut her name is?"

"Suttinly! Whut ails dat name?" Sandy asked.

"It don't sound nachel to me," Pap remarked. "Yellup! Sounds like somepin a dawg done said."

"Tain't nachel," Sandy replied. "It's Injun. Her an' her paw come recent from Texas."

"I bet dat gal is mighty nigh complete Injun," Vinegar Atts speculated.

"I'm mighty nigh complete nigger, too," Sandy grinned.

"Whut will yo' chillun be?" Skeeter Butts quacked.

Sandy meditated for a moment, surveyed Tickfall's dressy little soft-drink artist reflectively, and said:

"Dey'll be jelly beans, like you is, I reckon, but I cain't he'p it."

III

If this were a moving picture, there would now flash upon the screen a crude, cheaply printed handbill which had been circulated among the colored population of Tickfall and had excited great interest:

DR. BOOKER T. WASHINGTON No. 2

Senior Bishop Socrates High G. Dinks Is No. 2

Dr. Booker T. Washington No. 2, his private secretary, and Socrates are in town for a course of lectures.

Socrates is candidate for future moral leadership of American Negroes. Aspires for Dr. Booker T. Washington's shoes.

Socrates is well known in the financial world's Black Belt. Author, syentist, doctor of filosofy, *et cetera*, Ph. L.L. and D.D.

Here he launches his filosofy for national public consideration and analysis divinely impartiality. Ethiopest opponent oratorical battle wanted.

I remain as ever public servant,

SOCRATES HIGH G. DINKS.

Vinegar and his three friends went out to the tabernacle, in the evening, to see whether Dinks was as good as people said. Their inspection was critical, and yet they could find little to criticize adversely.

First, they agreed that Socrates High G. Dinks was good to look at. He was tall, slender, and long-legged, with a thin face and a stepladder head surmounted by a mop of gray wool.

"Gosh!" Skeeter commented. "He don't hab to ax fer no blessings from on

high. He's tall enough to reach up an' grab 'em!"

A long-tailed black coat swathed his emaciated form like a bath robe, and black trousers clothed his spindle legs. He wore no waistcoat, but displayed a big near-gold cross upon the flat surface, where his manly bosom ought to protrude. He had a green tie with a diamond pin in it. If that pin did not contain a genuine diamond as large as a peanut, then Socrates High G. had been cheated out of two bits at the ten-cent store.

There was a still more amazing thing about his wearing apparel.

"Looky, niggers!" Figger Bush whispered. "De Revun Socrates High G.'s socks is comin' down over his shoes!"

"Naw, dem ain't socks," Pap Curtain declared. "He's got little funny overshoes over his shoes, an' de foot part is tore off. No wonder he'd like to get Booker T. Washington's shoes!"

"Aw, shut up, you igernunt blacks!" Skeeter Butts snapped. "Dem is spats on his shoes!"

"Spats?" Figger Bush asked. "Whut do he wear 'em fer?"

"I dunno. Skeert he'll git cold foots, I reckon," Skeeter snickered. "He goes widout his vest to keep his stomick cool, an' wears spats to keep his foots warm."

"Hot member!" Pap Curtain sneered. "Shut up, an le's gib him a hearin'. Ef he sounds as good as he looks, he'll make a hit wid me."

For four days Socrates High G. had been ranting and raving like a madman. His speech was full of sound and fury, signifying nothing, but there is a fascination in physical activity. We like to watch the other fellow work. There is also a hypnotic charm in a monotonous voice howling like a lone hound on a hot trail. Additional excitement is generated by a crowd of people moaning, groaning, clapping their hands, and, by audible acclamations of approval, urging the orator to mightier efforts of vocal and acrobatic demonstration.

Socrates High G. had not much physical strength left. He had been on a lecture tour for forty days—days of exhausting labor, days of overfeeding, days of emotional excitement, days of a ranting, raving, simulated emotionalism which had made him a nervous wreck. His speech was about like this:

"Dis am a pore, sinful, Gawd-forsaken old world. Dis am a sad world. Dis here world ain't our rest. We is pilgrims an' strangers an' sojourners fer de night. We sets up our tents, we sleeps in de darkness, we pulls down our tents in de mawnin' an' moves on. Here in dis world we got no continuin' city, but we seeks one to come. We don't know whar we's gwine, but we is o-o-on our way. We is lookin' fer a city not made wid hands, eternal, in de heav-ums. Oh, we is lonesome, an' we is sorry sons of sorer, but we is trustin' in de Lawd, an', accordin' to His word, we will onderstan' it better by an' by!"

Instantly the enthusiastic audience began to sing the chorus of a song which the speaker's concluding phrase had brought to their minds, their voices rolling in great waves of sound, and echoing back from the forest trees that surrounded them:

"By an' by, when de mornin' comes,
All de saints of Gawd are gatherin' home;
We will tell de story how we've overcome;
We will onderstan' it better by an' by."

For nearly two hours this tirade had been going on. The speaker had almost drunk the water bucket dry, dipping from it with a long-handled gourd. He had howled and whooped until his voice had become a husky hoarseness in a parched and aching throat.

"He's spittin' cotton," Vinegar whispered to his companions, with a grin. "Dat shows he's mighty nigh all out."

Then Pap Curtain thrust his hand into his pocket and brought forth a newspaper clipping. He handed it to Vinegar Atts.

"I cut dis little piece out'n a Baton Rouge paper dis afternoon, Vinegar. It 'pears to me we is got a good escuse to run dis here Socrates."

Vinegar leaned over to get the light upon the article, and read:

Booker T. Washington No. 2 was fined twenty-five dollars in police court yesterday on a charge of carrying concealed weapons, and was ordered to leave town by the magistrate. The negro declared he was the "resurrected rejuvenation of Booker T. Washington," and was charged with being drunk, using inflammatory language, and carrying a pistol.

At this moment the audience was augmented by the arrival of the prospective bridegroom, Sandy Peck. Sandy had come to Tickfall with an ox team. After disposing of his business, securing his "pair of wedding licenses," and making arrange-

ments with Vinegar to marry him, he had driven out to the old camp ground where he always bedded his oxen on his trips to town. There he had found a meeting in progress in the tabernacle, and had sauntered in to see what it was all about.

Just as the horseman wears his spurs, so the ox driver always carries his guide line and his bull whip. Sandy had a rope about thirty feet long coiled around his elbow, while in his other hand he carried his leather-plaited "persuader."

He stood in the aisle, blinking and half blinded by the glare of the gasoline torches, a stupid, oxlike young giant, his garments torn and patched and caked with the dried mud of the swamp. He was, in character and disposition, as harmless as a town pump, but his appearance belied his amiable temperament. He looked like a man who would pull off your leg and beat you to death with it.

"Hey, Sandy!" Vinegar Atts whispered. "How come you fotch dat rope to church wid you? Whut you gwine do wid it?"

Sandy glanced down at the rope coiled upon his left arm. There was a look of surprise on his face, for he had not noticed before that he had brought with him the tools of his occupation.

"Whut you gwine do wid dat rope?" Vinegar demanded again.

"I'm gwine hang dis dang preacher!" Sandy Peck said with a grin, as he began to work his way slowly up the crowded aisle, looking for a vacant seat.

Suddenly the yellow monkey face of Pap Curtain became more simian than before. His eyes, close set and aslant like a Chinaman's, narrowed to tiny slits. He rubbed one hand over the other, unconsciously, as his tricky brain evolved a shrewd plan. Then he got up and walked around the tabernacle, appearing a minute later near the pulpit platform.

Pap saw old Isaiah Gaitskill sitting near the pulpit platform, and by violent gesticulations he indicated to that octogenarian that his presence was demanded immediately. The old man arose, bent, withered, and feeble, and crept across the front of the tabernacle in the attitude of a man stooping over to catch a rat.

"Whut you want?" he demanded of Pap.

Pap turned Isaiah about so that he faced the audience. Extending his arm and pointing with his finger, he said:

"Isaiah, you sight down my arm jes' like you wus sightin' a gun barrel. Does you see dat sandy, saddle-cullud nigger standin' in dat aisle?"

"Sho'! Dat's Sandy Peck," Isaiah told him.

"Does you see dat rope wropped aroun' Sandy's arm?"

"I does."

"I jes' called you out to tell you, Isaiah," Pap said. "I heard Sandy tell a feller jes' now dat he had fotch dat rope to dis meetin', an' wus gwine hang dis here Socrates High G. Dinks."

"Lawdymussy!" Isaiah wailed. "You mean Sandy is leadin' of a mob?"

"Mebbe so—I dunno," Pap replied. "I heard him say he wus fixin' to hang dat preacher. Vinegar Atts heard him say it, too."

At this point Socrates High G. Dinks sat down. The congregation again broke into song:

"We will tell de story how we've overcome;
We will onderstan' it better by an' by."

Isaiah left Pap and made his way as rapidly as he could to where Socrates High G. was sitting. He began to talk to the lecturer earnestly and rapidly. Pap watched the two men for a moment, then slunk away in the darkness.

"De Revun Senior Bishop Socrates High G. Dinks looks skeart," he commented to himself.

When the song ended, High G. arose and said earnestly:

"Brudder Isaiah Gaitskill will lead off a prayer. De Bible say 'Watch an' pray,' but you-all do de prayin' an' I'll do de watchin'!"

When old Isaiah started, Dinks started too; but Isaiah started on and Dinks started out. Dinks got off to a good start, too. By the time Isaiah had finished his prayer, Dinks had gone far.

Isaiah, being a sort of preacher, took charge of the services, dismissed the congregation, and then went to Constable Huff and had Sandy Peck arrested for disturbing public worship.

IV

WHEN the Big Four assembled for their morning conference, the one big item of business was the flight of Dinks and the arrest and imprisonment of Sandy Peck.

"Peck didn't had nothin' to do wid dat

meetin'," Vinegar Atts declared. "He jes' rambled in, an' Dinks scrambled out. How come dey blame Sandy an' put him in jail?"

"You will find out in a little while," Pap Curtain snarled.

"He ain't guilty," said Skeeter Butts.

"I bet you's gwine he'p prove dat he is," Pap told him gloomily.

"Aw, dar ain't nothin' to it," Figger Bush asserted. "Dey'll turn Sandy out right away. Dey got to turn him out, because he's got to git back to Shongaloon to-night to his weddin'."

At that moment Constable Huff entered the Henscratch and walked to the table where the men were sitting.

"All you boys are summoned to court this morning," he said in his soft voice. "Court opens at nine—better get to moving up that way."

In the court room, each of the four men was called to the witness stand, and each was compelled to testify reluctantly that he had heard Sandy Peck say that he had brought a certain rope to the tabernacle "to hang dat dang preacher." They identified Sandy and the thirty-foot rope, and were excused.

Pap Curtain testified that he had told Isaiah of Sandy's announced intention. Isaiah testified that he had informed High G. of the plot, and everybody knew that High G. had absented himself.

"Ten days in jail," announced the police judge, and Sandy Peck was escorted back to the little brown calaboose that stood among the pecan trees behind the courthouse.

Sandy howled and protested, cursed and expostulated, begged and pleaded, prayed and apologized, and finally called from the window of the jail—of which he was sole occupant—for the Big Four of Tickfall to come to his aid at once.

The four promptly assembled outside the window.

"I wants out!" Sandy wailed.

"Too bad, too bad!" Vinegar muttered, clucking like an old hen.

"You hadn't oughter done it," Figger Bush quacked.

"I didn't do it!" Sandy howled. "It wus did to me by Pap Curtain an' Isaiah Gaitskill!"

"I tuck you at yo' word, Sandy," Pap Curtain said, with a cunning gleam in his eyes. "Dis will learn you not to play

pranks an' cut up didoes in a religium meetin'."

"I wouldn't mind bein' in jail so much ef I warn't a deakin in a church up in Shongaloon, an' dis bad luck will scandalize my name," Sandy mourned.

"Too bad!" Vinegar clucked.

"I wants you four niggers to hunt up dat man dat wus speechin' at de tabernacle las' night," Sandy begged.

"He's done skedaddled," Vinegar said. "He's a millyum miles away by now."

"Dat nigger man could git me out," Sandy whined. "He knows I warn't aim-in' to hang him. Dat wus a joke. I didn't even know who he wus till atter he'd gone. De lights blinded up my eyes."

"Dat cullud pusson ain't here to laugh at de joke wid you," Pap Curtain remarked. "Ef he's travelin' as fast now as he wus when I seen him last, he ain't got no breath left in him to laugh wid."

"An' looky here, fellers," Sandy Peck wailed, when a new idea struck him. "Whut about me gittin' married to-night? How kin I git married when I'm in jail? I'm got dem licenses an' eve'ything!"

"Us 'll go up to Shongaloon an' fotch de gal down here," Figger Bush suggested.

"Naw!" Sandy Peck howled. "Ef dat gal hears dat I got ten days in jail, she won't never marry me at all! My gosh!"

"You got to send her some kind of word, Sandy," Skeeter said. "She's lookin' fer you to stand up wid her to-night."

Sandy suddenly became quiet, leaning with his shoulders against the bars of the window. His face was woefully distressed as he considered his predicament and its probable consequences.

"I'm a blowed-up skinny, niggers!" he remarked hopelessly. "It wus a bad time for me when I come to Tickfall. I'm shore had bad luck; but ef dar warn't no bad luck, I wouldn't hab no luck at all."

"Come along wid me, fellers," Pap Curtain said. "Le's set somewhar an' ponder on dis succumstance."

They followed Pap to the shade of a pecan in the rear of the jail, leaving Sandy's woeful face pressed against the window, and hearing his pleading voice:

"Fer Gawd's sake, niggers, he'p me outen dis mess!"

When the four had seated themselves, Pap Curtain made a speech:

"I pulled dat little stunt las' night to git Vinegar out of his trouble an' run dat new

preacher out of town. De daminite exploded an' blowed Sandy in jail. I didn't had no intentions of gwine dat fur in my plan; but now Sandy is done got his ten days, his weddin' is busted up, his name is scandalized as a orficer in de church, his ox team is out here in de woods wid nobody to keer fer it—"

"Ain't it so?" Figger Bush interrupted. "I never seed nothin' bust up so complete."

"I sees it dis way, niggers," Skeeter Butts remarked. "Pap Curtain come to de rescue of Vinegar Atts. Now it's de Christyum duty of Vinegar Atts to come to de rescue of Sandy Peck."

"How is dat did?" Vinegar inquired.

"I proposes dis," Skeeter continued. "We will take keer of Sandy's oxen. We will keep Sandy supplied wid seegaws, candy, an' grub fer de nex' ten days. We will keep him conversed durin' de daytime by talkin' at him through de winder, an' we mought ramble by at night an' sing him a toon or two. We'll comfort him—yes, suh, we'll keep his heart up!"

"Dat 'll be fine," Vinegar muttered, wondering just what Skeeter would prescribe for his part in the undertaking.

"Vinegar goes up to Shongaloon," continued the proprietor of the Henscratch, "an' comforts de bride, whose weddin' is got to be postponed off fer ten days, owin' to succumstances dat we cain't control."

"I don't know whut to say to no fool postponed bride," Vinegar protested.

"Anyhow, dat's yo' job, revun," Skeeter announced in a tone of finality. "Dis here meetin' is now adjourned."

V

THAT same afternoon Vinegar arrived in Shongaloon and called at the home of Pawnee Yellup.

"Sandy Peck done engaged me fer yo' weddin' to-night, Pawnee, but I come up to fotch you some bad news."

"Is Sandy drunk?" Pawnee inquired.

"No, ma'am, Sandy is sober, but some white men is keepin' him in town on a little bizness, an' he axed me to tell you dat he cain't git off to git married. He wants you to wait fer him ontill he gits out—I means, gits back."

There was about an hour of this question and answer exchange, and again and again Vinegar, the preacher, skirted the perilous edge of truth. The girl watched him with sharp Indian eyes. Her high

cheek bones, thin lips, and slender body conveyed the impression of restless energy, violent temper, and an unamiable disposition. Her face was good to look at, but Vinegar felt that he had to treat her as he would have treated a pet tiger—be nice to her and watch her.

"Whut do Sandy expeck me to do while I waits?" Pawnee wanted to know.

"He ain't say," Vinegar told her; "but I would shore be glad ef you will he'p me while you waits. I starts a meetin' in Shongaloon to-night. Cain't you play on de orgin an' sing?"

"Shore kin!"

"All right—dat's settled," Vinegar replied in a gratified tone. "Us will run dis meetin' fer de nex' ten days, you an' me. I'll do de preachin', an' you kin take charge of de music."

That night Pawnee Yellup sat in the choir and listened to the deep-sea roarings of Vinegar Atts. The Indian predominated in the girl's blood and brain, and the worship of her ancestors had been related to the mountains and the sea, the rivers and the mist-hung valley, the sun, the stars, the white clouds, and the Great Spirit that was above and beyond them all.

She looked at the Rev. Vinegar Atts with disillusioned eyes. She saw a large, broad-chested man, whose stomach was so full of good intentions that he waddled when he walked. She saw a head as round as a bullet, bald on top, with a little wad of wool over each ear, making him look like a mule wearing a blind bridle. She saw a neck so thick that his collar was in danger of slipping over his head, and feet covering so much ground that a bitter Indian smile crossed her lips like a shadow whenever Vinegar sang "How firm a foundation."

She listened to his deep bass voice with its wonderful vibratory qualities, and noticed how he worked himself up into a tempest of passion until his voice got off the pitch, and cracked and sounded like the hoarse blating of an old sheep with a disease of the throat.

She was disgusted with the whole performance. She had seen her father do the same sort of thing, and he had disgusted her, too. After it was over, she knew that Vinegar would go home with one of the "brethren," eat a hearty supper, tell anecdotes of boisterous African hilarity, and indicate generally that he did not give a—rap—what happened to the unconverted

until some colored boy "knocked the bell" to call them together for the next meeting.

She recalled a song which she had heard Sandy sing to his ox team as he came in from the swamps, and she wished her lover was present to sing it now:

"He chawed up all de Bible,
An' den spit out de Scripter;
An' when he 'gin to argue strong,
He wus a snortin' ripter!"

And then, like a miracle, her prospective bridegroom appeared upon the scene. Sandy Peck stood in the aisle just as he had in the old tabernacle the night before, a stupid, oxlike young giant, his garments torn and patched and caked with the dried mud of the swamps, with his guide line wrapped around his left elbow and a bull whip in his right hand.

Directly behind Sandy, entering at the same time, was the Senior Bishop Socrates High G. Dinks, Booker T. Washington No. 2, unchanged in appearance from the mop of gray wool on the top of his head to the spats on his feet.

When Vinegar Atts saw them, he uttered a howl that was not in the sermon, and swept his eyes around, looking for a convenient exit. He was just about to step out from the back of one bench to another, and leave by the open window, when he saw with infinite relief that both men appeared to be in excellent good humor and were grinning at him.

Vinegar brought the exercises to a sudden conclusion by announcing a hymn well known to the congregation, and "raised the tune" himself without the aid of the organ. Pawnee Yellup, her services at the organ dispensed with, arose and walked down the aisle to where Sandy was standing.

"Where you been at?" she demanded.

"I been in jail," Sandy replied sullenly.

"Whut is you done?" Pawnee asked.

"Dey suspicioned me of tryin' to hang a nigger preacher," Sandy told her.

"Did you hang him?" Pawnee inquired, with a sudden access of interest.

"Naw!" Sandy grinned, glancing down at the rope coiled on his left arm. "He seen me comin', an' legged it."

Pawnee grabbed the young negro's arm and pulled him toward the altar of the church, where Vinegar Atts stood singing the concluding stanza of his hymn.

"Gawd bless you, Sandy!" she ex-

claimed. "Git yo' rope ready an' come wid me! Dis here Vinegar Atts needs hangin' bad!"

Sandy advanced reluctantly, but the two were within a step of the altar when the song ended. Vinegar looked down at the young people with a benignly professional air. While the congregation stood, expecting to be dismissed in the customary manner, the preacher surprised them all with the words:

"Dearly beloved, we is assembled in de presence of Gawd an' dese here witnesses to unite togedder dis man an' dis woman in de holy bonds of mattermony. Who giveth dis here woman away?"

"I does!" the voice of Senior Bishop Socrates High G. Dinks intoned.

At the first shock of surprise the two young people at the altar wavered and recoiled; but when the voice of the senior bishop was heard in the rear, they rallied and stood their ground, and were duly married in the presence of the congregation.

The crowd in the church, delighted at the unexpected event of the meeting, rushed up to the young people. Vinegar pushed through the mob until he came to High G. Dinks.

"How in de name of mud did you git in on dis?" Vinegar demanded. "Las' night I seen you leavin' out."

"Dat wus a mistake," High G. said, sheepishly. "You see, de white folks tuck twenty-five dollars off'n me at Baton Rouge—"

"I read about dat in de paper," Vinegar interrupted.

"An' when old Isaiah tole me a mob wus comin' atter me, an' I looked out an' seen a crowd of white folks, I skint out," Dinks continued.

"Dar wusn't no white folks dar," Vinegar told him.

"Dat wus de mistake," Dinks grinned.

"Whut I thought wus white folks wus dem two white steers dat Sandy wus drivin'. When Sandy got in jail, I oozed back to town an' esplaind to de judge, an' got Sandy turned loose."

"I bet Sandy wus glad to see you," Vinegar remarked.

"You wins dat bet," High G. laughed. "You see, I wus lecturin' to buy Sandy an' Pawnee a little farm fer a weddin' present. I got de money, too! I wusn't lecturin' under my nachel-bawn name. I'm Pawnee Yellup's daddy!"

That Fifty-Dollar Hat

HERE IS A REVELATION FOR THE WEARERS OF FEMININE
HEADGEAR—AND PERHAPS AN ILLUMINATING HINT
TO THE MEN WHO FOOT THE BILLS

By Florence Ryerson

ROSALIND slowly walked down the boulevard.

Once, barely a short week ago, this might have been a fit subject for a poet. Rosalind, gold, and white, and sweet, tripping down the street, on slender, dancing feet—something of that sort—set to the kind of music that runs little thrills up and down the spine.

But to-day it was different. The only appropriate accompaniment for Rosalind's footsteps would have been a dirge—one of those *tum-tum-te-tum* things away down in the base, and a general feeling of crape and purple plumes in the distance.

For Rosalind, walking down the boulevard, faced a world that was uniformly gray. Ever since a week ago Thursday, Rosalind's heart had been broken. Not merely cracked or fractured, but broken past mending, with edges that showed plainly to the most casual observer.

And she did not even care. That was the tragic thing about it. She did not care who knew.

If Oliver no longer loved her, nothing mattered. If Oliver did not want her, nobody would ever want her. She was doomed to be one of those pathetic unmarried females who live in boarding houses, and get older and scrawnier and yellower every year, until they mercifully dry up and blow away.

At the awful thought she hastened her steps a trifle, and resolutely turned her face away from the entrance to a little park. She did not dare look at that park. It was entirely too full of green benches, where she and Oliver had sat. Of trees, under which she and Oliver had stood. Of squirrels, that she and Oliver had fed.

It was quite as bad as that. One of those girl and boy affairs that are so lovely to look at—and frequently turn out so badly. Five years of waiting for Oliver to get on his feet financially; and now, in the very week of his promotion, Oliver was taking up with the Ponting girl, and mooning—absolutely sick-calfing—all over the place!

Not that Rosalind had anything against the Ponting girl. Rosalind was nothing if not fair, and she admitted frankly that the Ponting girl was really a nice girl.

A very nice girl, indeed, except that she had that particularly unattractive shade of red hair which simply shrieked of temper, and her voice was just a trifle sharp. And wasn't there something a little—well, not bold, exactly, but at least forward about her manner?

Of course, she must have known that Oliver was virtually engaged. Every one knew it.

That was the trouble. Every one knew that Rosalind and Oliver had been inseparable since high school, and every one was expecting them to send out announcements any day. And Rosalind had simply bales of towels and napkins all marked with large and curley M's, which was Oliver's initial and not hers.

Rosalind laid aside her grief for a moment to weave a little romance about that linen.

She would never use it—never. Only sometimes she would open the chest, and drop a tear into its lavender-scented depths. And years hence, when her eldest grandchild was going to be married—

Only, of course, if she never married, she could hardly have a grandchild. Per-

haps it would be Oliver's grandchild; a lovely little thing, with Oliver's dark hair. Rosalind would call her to the old chest, open it, and say:

"Once, my dear, I was going to marry your grandfather, and I made this linen. See, it is marked with your own initial."

Or would it be? Rosalind wondered. Not unless the grandchild's name began with M.

What would Oliver's grandchild's name begin with? It would depend upon whether she was the daughter of a daughter, or the daughter of a son.

Or she might marry a man whose name began with M. It was all terribly confusing to her.

Rosalind's head began to ache, and her footsteps dragged.

II

It was at this moment that she saw Robert Van Nordoff. He was getting out of his motor car, and pausing to tell his chauffeur where and when to pick him up, quite like the hero of a motion picture.

Nobody but Robert Van Nordoff could simultaneously juggle his gloves, wave a stick, and address a professional driver with quite that air. And nobody had hair that was so delightfully touched with gray at the temples.

He was the most eligible bachelor in town, and in every line of his attitude it was written that he knew it. Now he turned away from the curb and glanced up the street, his eye passing from woman to woman with the critical expression of a connoisseur.

With gloomy foreboding, Rosalind knew that he would not even see her, or, if he did, he would merely acknowledge her presence with his third best nod. Rosalind knew all his greetings, having studied them from afar.

There was his third best nod, his second best handclasp, and what she mentally termed the extra special gesture with which he kissed a favored lady's hand. Even engaged to Oliver, Rosalind had remarked the way Robert Van Nordoff kissed a hand.

In spite of herself, her footsteps hastened a trifle, and brought her abreast of him.

He saw her now. Being a gentleman, he could scarcely do less. Since fate had placed her directly in his path, it was either notice her or fall over her.

For an instant his cool and appraising

regard swept over her, from the drooping and disheartened brim of her mouse-gray hat to the toes of her lagging feet. Just so might he have regarded a bug, a particularly unattractive insect, in his path.

A moment later he had lifted his hat and passed hurriedly up the steps of his club.

It had been, quite unmistakably it had been, his third best nod. Rosalind had expected nothing more, of course, but she stared after him a trifle resentfully none the less.

He might have paused long enough to say good afternoon, and not have hurried past as if she had the measles! Well, she supposed life would be like that now.

She simply would have to face the fact that the world was not scarlet and gold, as she had always imagined, but gray, with purple edges, and its lining, most probably, was black.

This gloomy thought occupied her as far as her Cousin Julie's gate. She had not set out to see her relative, but she might as well drop in for a moment.

She hadn't seen her for a week, and, knowing her cousin, she realized that, with Julie, almost anything might happen in seven days. Also, she could unburden herself of the news about Oliver—that is, if she could get Julie to stop talking for a moment and listen.

With a little sigh, Rosalind pushed open the gate and mounted the steps.

Julie was in her boudoir, curled intricately around a pink satin chair. Her knees were crossed, showing an excessive expanse of skin-colored silk leg.

Above the leg was a brief but interesting froth of green chiffon and yellow lace, and above that not much of anything but Julie. Just at the moment she was talking over a telephone that had ruffled skirts and a doll's head, and, as frequently happened, she was engaged in fluently and convincingly lying to some man.

Rosalind sat down and listened to a really expert performance.

"But, really!" Julie cooed. "I'm horribly sorry about the tickets; I'm simply devastated! But I couldn't possibly have known I was going to have a headache, now, could I? You can see I couldn't possibly have known! And it's hurting horribly; I'm an absolute wreck at this minute—I really am, and—"

She broke off for a moment, and listened, then shook her head.

"Oh, now," she said, "you mustn't bother; really, you mustn't. I'll just go to bed quietly and try to get a little sleep. And I'm dreadfully sorry about the tickets; I really am." She set down the telephone and flashed across the room to her dressing table, where she took up a pot of rouge and began operations upon her right cheek.

"Now," she said to Rosalind, "of course he'll be up here in half an hour with violets or something, and he'll find me having tea with that what-you-call-um—you know—the new poet with the curly hair."

"But—" Rosalind stared at her. "Won't he be angry?"

"Furious, darling; simply furious!" Julie replied. "And it's what he needs. But, of course, I'll recover from my headache in time to go to the show."

For a moment Rosalind regarded her hopelessly.

"I don't see how you do it," she said, enviously. "I really don't. If it isn't one man, it's another—and usually it's two or three. And I—" Her voice frankly arose in a wail. "I simply can't get one to look at me!"

Julie picked up a lip-stick and began to carve a perfect bow.

"Well," she observed, "you've got Oliver. Of course, if you're engaged to him, you oughtn't to need any one else—which reminds me!"

She went on before Rosalind could stop her. "I saw him having tea at Paulais's with that red-headed Ponting cat. I wouldn't let him, if I were you."

"Let him!" Rosalind exclaimed. "Let him!"

"No," said Julie, "I wouldn't. Of course, she's not really dangerous, because she's got her claws out for Robert Van Nordoff. But, just the same, my dear, men are all such fools that I'd just see that Oliver kept away from her."

"But I can't!" Rosalind admitted, tragically. "It's too late! Oliver and I—"

III

BUT, as usual, Julie was not listening. She was regarding Rosalind with a new and intense look, and her brow was puckering painfully.

"There's something wrong, darling," she said. "I don't know what it is, but it's something. It isn't the dress. That sort of gray is always good, and it has the right line. The shoes are perfect, and that bag

is, too, but the whole effect is—well—sort of droopy, you know."

She paused in sudden inspiration. "It's the hat! Where on earth did you get the thing?"

Rosalind reached her hand dispiritedly to her head, and removed the offending object.

"Oh, I bought it last week," she said, vaguely. "It was marked down to seven ninety-eight, and I'd spent all my allowance on some towels."

"Good Heavens!" Julie cried. "It's a positive graveyard horror. No wonder Oliver has taken to that red-headed flibbertigibbet. At least, she has sense enough to stick to yellow and green. If you had red hair, you'd probably wear pink!"

Rosalind drooped despondently.

"Oh," she said, "it really doesn't matter how I look, because nobody ever looks at me anyway. I might as well get used to it."

"Used to it? Fiddlesticks!" Julie said, applying perfume to her left ear. "No girl ever gets used to not being looked at until she's planted under a nice granite headstone with 'Here Lies' on it. Then I'll bet she wonders if it's on straight. What you need is to quit initialing dish towels, and put some thought on your clothes."

"I have stopped initialing dish towels," Rosalind announced, tragically. "I shall never initial another one, because Oliver and I—"

"Sh-h-h!" Julie said, and held up her hand. For a moment she listened to sounds from below, then she sprang into action.

"It's that poet chap," she declared. "For Heaven's sake, give me his book—it's over on the table beside you—the purple one with pink spots. I've got to look up his name before I go downstairs."

Rosalind handed her the book, and Julie regarded its back for a moment, and started for the door, muttering "Waite—Waite—late—hate—Waite!" under her breath.

"But you're not to see him in that green thing!" Rosalind protested, horrified. Julie looked down at the wisp of jade, and back at her cousin.

"Why not?" she demanded. "It's a tea gown. Mme. Franchine said it was, and goodness knows she charged enough to make it respectable. Anyway, it carries out the headache idea, and if he shows up—"

"Who, the poet?" Rosalind interrupted.

"No, darling, the other one. If he shows up, he'll think I really did have a headache, but I refused to see him, and then saw the Waite man, and it 'll make him mad, and be good for his soul."

She was at the door by now, but on the threshold she paused.

"And, Rosie, you simply can't wear that horror, or it 'll haunt me on my deathbed. There's a hat in the closet I've never worn. Franchine sold it to me when I wasn't looking, and it simply howls at the new complexion I'm using—but it 'd be lovely on you. Take it and wear it, with my blessing. It's the end one on the left."

She danced out the door, but a moment later stuck her impertinent nose inside again. "It ought to be good looking—it cost fifty dollars," she said, and was gone.

For a moment Rosalind looked from the now empty doorway to the gray straw in her lap. Then, being a woman, she arose, threw open the closet door, and stepped inside.

It was a large closet, a treasure chest of blues and greens and opals, with flashes of frothy orange and bits of silver shot lavender. Rows of frivolous slippers against one wall, lines of dashing sweaters against the other, and above—perched like tropical birds on shelves of cream ivory—hats, hats, and hats!

Hats, purple and gold, orange and brown, buttercup yellow, white, cream with a green feather, black, all black, with a frill of cobwebby lace. Rosalind's eye passed over them hurriedly to the corner where sat The Hat.

It was red. Not scarlet or vermilion, nor yet cerise or ox blood, but a tint all its own—a clear, live radiance like the very flame of a color.

It was small, but its brim curved upward at one side, and balancing the curve, a little sheaf of feathers, the same shade as the hat, drooped from the brim and cascaded to the shoulder, giving it an air of impish coquetry.

For a moment Rosalind stared, then she pounced upon the thing and bore it from the closet into the room. In front of the mirror she paused, closed her eyes for a prayerful second, and pressed the flaming crown upon her head. Then slowly she opened her eyes again.

Much has been written about love at first sight, about the meeting of kindred spirits, and the unity of twin souls; but

nowhere has a poet limned the first meeting of a woman and her predestined hat. Yet the moment is as big, as fraught with possibilities, as any lovers' meeting.

Women have broken up homes, women have ruined lives, women have murdered husbands, for things of far less importance than a hat. And when the perfect woman meets the perfect hat, and knows that it is indissolubly and forever hers—

This was such a moment, and Rosalind, staring in the mirror, saw that the limp and hopeless figure that had dragged itself into the room was gone.

In its place she found a flushed and starry-eyed young person, who held her head aloft with an almost insolent surety of bearing, who tiptilted her nose at a delicious angle, and whose shoulders squared proudly under well modeled gray chiffon.

In short, she saw a woman ready to go forth and do battle, unafraid of the world and the devil, because she is conscious—oh, most delightfully conscious!—that malign fate has no hold upon her since she is supremely clad.

Rosalind regarded the young person in the mirror for a breath-taking moment, noting the swirl of pale gold hair under the rakish brim, the way the feather licked at her shoulder like little dancing flames.

"Fifty dollars!" Rosalind said, and her voice, in its awe and wonder, sounded not unlike a prayer. "A fifty-dollar hat!"

Suddenly she turned and started down the stairs.

Julie was in the sun room. Rosalind could hear her voice mingled with deeper masculine tones, but she did not pause.

Julie, in her affairs of sentiment, was distinctly a soloist, and would not thank her cousin for intruding. And why should Rosalind waste her time indoors when the whole wide world was waiting to see her hat?

IV

SHE slipped out the door and once more faced the boulevard, but this time her feet tripped along, and as they tripped, the crisp *tap-a-tap* of her heels beat into the rhythm of a song.

"A hat! A hat! A fifty-dollar hat!" they chanted joyously.

Others, mere passers-by, seemed to catch the hint of a song in her footsteps. They looked at her, first idly, then with attention, and deep in their eyes she saw mir-

rored the thought that here was something worth looking at.

They were variously affected, according to their age and sex. The men straightened their ties, the women their hats. And all the while the breeze chuckled, the sun smiled, and the world was gold, pure gold, to Rosalind.

For a time she passed along at a brisk pace, then slowly modified her steps. It would not do—it really would *not* do—to walk too quickly. She would reach the other end of the boulevard too soon, and she wanted to prolong to its last delicious moment the glory of this walk.

So she brought her dancing feet to a more leisurely pace, and even paused, now and then, to gaze into a window, ostensibly at the display within, but really to catch one more ravishing glimpse of the hat.

And, just as she paused at a window where a thoughtful florist had placed a mirror, she ran into Robert Van Nordoff. This last verb is quite literal. The great catch was coming out of the store at a brisk stride as Rosalind turned away from the window, and in turning she could not resist one last, backward glance in the mirror. The result was something really notable in the way of a crash.

Robert Van Nordoff lost his gloves, his cane, and a small green box he was carrying. He bent over to pick the things from the sidewalk, and Rosalind, all contrition, bent over, too.

The result, this time, was that they bumped heads. Mr. Van Nordoff lost his hitherto irreproachable temper.

"If you'd leave things alone—" he began, and broke off suddenly.

Rosalind was looking down at him. Her eyes were very wide and blue, her lips were parted a trifle breathlessly, and the clear curve of her hair shone pale gold against a background of flame.

But it was not this which gave him pause. It was the whole jaunty effect of her, the pert tilt of her nose, the rakish angle of her hat brim—slightly askew, but still devastating—her whole indescribable air of owning the earth and all things on it.

Mr. Van Nordoff arose hastily to his feet, and snatched off his hat in his second best gesture. For a moment he regarded Rosalind with an intensity of look which, in other men, would have been called staring. Then he stepped toward her a trifle uncertainly.

"It—it's Miss Styles, isn't it?" he asked.

Rosalind turned for a moment, and straightened her hat before the mirror in the window. Then she swung back again.

"Yes," she answered sweetly, with a hesitation which matched his own. "Your face seems familiar, but I can't—can't quite—"

"Robert Van Nordoff," he supplied. "I met you at your cousin's; you remember?"

Rosalind remembered gracefully.

"Of course!" she agreed. "I knew I'd met you somewhere!" As he made no move, she added: "Don't you think you'd better pick up your things?"

Mr. Van Nordoff hastily retrieved his gloves, cane, and the florist's box, then turned back to her again.

"There's something about you—" he said, puzzled. "I can't seem to make it out, but you look different."

"Perhaps it's being run into," Rosalind suggested. "It was rather a bump."

"I hope," he said, quickly solicitous, "I didn't hurt you with my clumsiness!"

"Oh, no," Rosalind replied. "And I was quite as much to blame as you were—quite! Don't think of it again."

She gave him a little nod and turned to go, but he caught her arm and drew her toward the doorway of the shop.

"But I *will* think of it!" he protested. "It was entirely my fault, and I can't have you blaming yourself. Really, I can't!"

Rosalind smiled, disclosing a dimple.

"Have it your own way," she said. "But, really, I'd better go on. We're blocking the doorway."

"Doorway?" Mr. Van Nordoff remarked vaguely, and looked about as though just discovering the place. "Oh, yes! We'd better go inside."

"But I don't want to go inside," Rosalind explained. "I'm out for a walk."

"But you ought to come in for a moment and rest," Mr. Van Nordoff argued. "Really, you can never tell what a shock like that will do, and I couldn't possibly let you go off without resting. You might faint or something."

"I'll tell you!" he added, in sudden inspiration. "Just sit down for a moment while I find some flowers to match that hat."

Rosalind came into the shop. It was gray and green inside, with lavender chairs, and a fountain.

There also was a white-haired florist,

who appeared to know Mr. Van Nordoff extremely well. The two went into a heated discussion over the hat.

The florist held out for flame-colored roses, but Mr. Van Nordoff had ideas of his own. Under his direction, the florist made up a corsage of tiny dahlias that were scarlet, tipped with faint gold, and when it was complete, even the florist was compelled to admit it was just exactly right.

Against the faint, smoky gray of Rosalind's gown it was perfect, and when taken with the scarlet and gold of the hat and her hair—

Mr. Van Nordoff turned back to the florist and handed him the green box he was carrying.

"On second thought, I'll let you send this up," he said. "I won't have time to drop in this afternoon."

To Rosalind, he announced firmly: "I'm going to see you home. I couldn't think of letting you go alone."

V

ONCE more she walked down the boulevard, and now the world was not only golden, but she tripped along a pathway of yellow-tipped dahlias. Above, in the tree tops, all the birds in the world were singing happily.

Something of this seemed to reach Mr. Van Nordoff. He regarded the sky through his glass, and threw a glance of approval at the world.

"I have never," he said, "no never, seen a more perfect afternoon."

Rosalind laughed a little, and caught her breath. "Nor I," she agreed.

"It would be exactly the afternoon for a long drive," Mr. Van Nordoff declared, and looked at her hopefully.

"Wouldn't it!" Rosalind exclaimed.

"I have a car waiting," Mr. Van Nordoff revealed. "It could take us over to the river, and possibly—if we phoned your mother—we might have dinner—"

They drove through a world that was emerald and sapphire, set in a filigree of gold, and dined in an amethyst twilight. Their table was on a little balcony that overhung the river, and the night was starred with slim candles that flamed and paled.

From a distance came music, so faint and sweet that it seemed like the pale ghost of enchanted sound. In the flickering light

Rosalind's hair shone pale gold, her eyes were misty pools of gray, and the hat glowed like the spirit of a flame.

Mr. Van Nordoff leaned across the table.

"Why haven't I known you before?" he demanded. "How could I possibly have lived in this town and not known you?"

Rosalind caught her breath.

"I—I don't know," she replied. "I suppose we've both been too busy."

"It's been that Oliver Machin!" Mr. Van Nordoff complained. "I heard you were engaged to the young cub, and that's the reason I haven't tried to know you better. You—you aren't engaged to him, are you?"

He was looking at her eagerly, and Rosalind shook her head.

"No," she answered softly, "not now." And she added after a moment: "Poor Oliver!"

"Ah, yes," Mr. Van Nordoff said. "Poor, poor Oliver! To have lost you—"

His voice trailed away, leaving a long, meaningful pause. For a time they stared into the enchanted darkness, where the river gurgled and laughed and told little jokes to itself, then Robert Van Nordoff sighed and looked at his watch.

"I hate to suggest leaving," he confessed, "but 'Moontime' opens to-night. They say it's rather a good cast, and I thought—that is, I hoped—"

Rosalind lifted her hands in dismay.

"Oh, but, really, I couldn't!" she protested. "In these clothes!"

He regarded her with a look which was almost a caress.

"They are charming!" he declared. "The dress is delightful, and that hat—I don't believe I've ever seen anything more perfect than the hat, or is it the way you wear it?"

Rosalind laughed and arose.

"Of course, if you feel that way—" She paused suddenly. "But the tickets! Won't we have trouble getting in?"

Mr. Van Nordoff drew an envelope from his pocket and flourished it triumphantly.

"Here are the tickets!" he announced.

They were in the front row downstairs, in the exact center, where the ingénue could blow her kisses and the comedian could drop his jokes into their very laps. And it also was where all the opera glasses in the house could point.

Rosalind could fairly feel them focusing on the back of her neck, like burning

glasses. She would not have turned her head for all the money in the world.

Mr. Van Nordoff had no such reticence. He turned and leisurely surveyed the house, nodding to left and right, then turned back and smiled at Rosalind.

"Your friend is here," he said.

"My friend?" she inquired; but the swift color mounted to her cheeks.

"Poor Oliver," Mr. Van Nordoff explained. "He's in the balcony with Miss Ponting."

"Oh, I'm glad!" Rosalind said generously. "She's such a nice girl, and so pretty—don't you think? With that lovely red hair—"

Mr. Van Nordoff's gaze was on the delicious curl of gold over Rosalind's shell-pink ear.

"If you want to know the color of hair I like," he said, "the way to find out is to go to a mirror and look in."

VI

AND the evening passed in a blaze of lights, a whirl of pink-legged girls, a mist of music; with opera glasses to left and right, with people whispering in the back-ground, and Oliver—Oliver and the red-headed Ponting girl—in the balcony. Almost before Rosalind knew it, the last curtain was down, the audience was rising, and she felt Robert Van Nordoff's hand at her elbow.

"Did you like it?" he asked, smiling down at her.

Rosalind looked up. Her eyes were bluer, her cheeks pinker, her lips more curved and eager than eyes and cheeks and lips have any right to be.

"I loved it!" she replied. "Loved it better than anything I've ever seen! I can't bear to think it is over."

Mr. Van Nordoff took her arm more securely.

"It isn't over yet," he assured her. "Not for a little while. I don't intend to give you up until we've been to Paulais's."

"Paulais's?" Rosalind breathed. "Paulais's!" She hesitated. "Wait a minute, till I straighten my hat!"

Paulais's was crowded. It was always crowded at that time of night, and groups were waiting for space, but at sight of Mr. Van Nordoff an obsequious head waiter hurried forward and led them to a table. It was a very special table, reserved for the elect, and every one in the room knew it.

Also, everybody seemed to know who was with Robert Van Nordoff, and, one by one, their glances strayed to a booth in a corner. It did not require second sight on Rosalind's part to guess that somewhere in that corner Oliver lurked with the Ponting girl.

Rosalind had often sat in that corner with Oliver. Two days ago she could not have looked at it without tears, but now she could view it without a pang. The corner was pleasant, of course, and retiring, but one did not come to Paulais's to be retiring—not when one wore a fifty-dollar hat!

She leaned over the table and smiled at Mr. Van Nordoff, so dazzlingly that the distracted man put salt in his ice cream.

"Do you know," she said, "I think it was tremendously clever of you to think of Paulais's. I simply *love* it!"

Mr. Van Nordoff took a spoonful of his ice cream and discovered the salt. He shook a finger at Rosalind.

"Look here!" he said. "You've got to stop looking at me in that ravishing way and 'simply loving' things. How can you expect a man to keep his mind on what he's doing when you manage to look like that?"

Rosalind did not answer. She did not even hear him. She was smiling happily at nothing in particular, because, deep in her heart, she knew that when it came to saying good night, Mr. Van Nordoff would not content himself with his third best nod, but would surely—oh, so surely—kiss her hand.

VII

ROSALIND was still in bed when Julie arrived the next morning. She was propped against a blue and white pillow, and beside her a great sheaf of yellow roses reflected the glint in her hair.

If her room was not as extravagantly beautiful as Julie's boudoir, it was at least a charming background for her morning loveliness. Julie regarded her with a little frown.

"I don't see how you can wake up like that," she scolded prettily. "All pink and curly, after being out all hours of the night."

"How did you know?" Rosalind asked, surprised.

"Everybody knows," Julie replied. "I met it all up and down the street. Every

one's telling everybody else about the ride, and the dinner, and the theater, and that he's sent you roses this morning—" She broke off suddenly. "Was that Oliver I fell over on the front steps?"

"It might be," Rosalind conceded. "I've just been talking to him over the phone, and he said he was coming over. There was something very important that he wanted to explain."

"About the Ponting girl, I suppose," Julie remarked. She paused, and regarded Rosalind as one fencer might another. "I fancy you'll use that as an excuse for breaking it off."

"Breaking what off?" Rosalind asked, innocently.

"Your engagement," Julie said. "You won't want him hanging around, now that you've got Robert Van Nordoff."

Rosalind drew herself up and stared at her.

"Robert Van Nordoff!" she exclaimed. "But I don't want the old thing!"

It was Julie's turn to stare.

"You mean," she began—"you don't actually mean you'd keep on with Oliver if you had a chance with Robert! Then, if you didn't want him, why did you kidnap him from under my very nose yesterday? I think it was simply hateful of you!"

She paused at sight of Rosalind's face.

"Good gracious! Don't tell me you didn't know it was Robert Van Nordoff I was talking to on the phone!"

"But you said—" Rosalind began, in turn. "The Ponting girl—"

"I said she was trying, darling—but she wasn't getting anywhere!"

Julie arose and threw herself upon Rosalind. "Oh, I'm so glad it's not true! I simply couldn't bear to think you'd do it, Rosie, because, even if you are my cousin, I've always said you were no cat! Although I do think you're a darling idiot. I can't understand any one having a chance at Robert and deliberately taking Oliver."

For a moment the two regarded each other, then Rosalind leaned over and kissed Julie.

"No," she said, "I don't suppose you could, but, you see, I'm sort of used to Oliver—and then there are those towels and things—" She broke off at a sudden thought. "My goodness, Julie! I've never thanked you for the hat!"

"Hat!" Julie exclaimed. "But you didn't take it, darling."

Her eyes roved around the room and fell on a flare of scarlet beside the dresser.

"Good Heavens!" she moaned. "You didn't wear *that* one! Why, I bought it for black Dinah's sister to get married in! I picked it up at a bargain sale for seven ninety-eight!"

THE ROSEATE COCKATOO

BLACK moths fly and old winds cry

In the dreary wood.

You are gone where you were drawn,

Blithely as you could.

You will find that you are blind,

Till you're in the lair,

Then the sounds will deal you wounds,

Fatal with despair.

Once I said that when I'm dead

I will follow you.

I shall be, when I am free,

A roseate cockatoo.

You're afraid to face the shade

Where there is no light.

You will fear to feel me near,

Rustling in the night!

That I leave will lie and grieve

By the rooted oak.

It will blow, but none will know

My heart ever broke!

Sonia Ruthile Novák

His One Best Betty

SHE MIGHT HAVE BEEN A PALE PRINCESS, PINING AWAY IN
HER TOWER; AND HE A "VERAY PARFIT GENTIL KNIGHT"

By George F. Worts

HE was a very good-looking young man; tall, keen-eyed, clean-jawed. His hair was reddish-blond; tight little curls on the sides of the head, and rather loose, graceful curls in front.

He had an ardent look about him. He carried himself with an air. Here, you said to yourself, was somebody. Even in his somewhat shabby clothes, he had that air of being a person of affairs, of importance, of wealth.

There was a tigerlike swing to his shoulders as he walked. He had hairy, handsome fists, and he always carried them half closed. They looked like the kind of hands that took hold of things; accomplished things.

There was a determined briskness, an assurance, in the young fellow's manner as he unwrapped the thick bundle of canvases and ranged them in a row along the back of the great long table. He put each canvas on its bottom edge with a certain certainty. He seemed to give each one a pat, an affectionate pat. You knew that he liked those canvases; you knew that they stood very highly indeed in his estimation.

They were pictures of ships—sailing ships—merchantmen with every inch of canvas set and pulling hard. Some sailed into the onlooker's eye. Others went about their affairs on the port or starboard tack.

Sharks' fins cut the dazzling blue water in some; in others, the waves were big and hungry. There were barks and barkentines, clipper ships and schooners, and each and every ship sped on its course under a good hard breeze.

This fleet of painted ships upon painted oceans created a somewhat bewildering effect, their sails were so snowy, the water upon which they sailed was so sensuously blue.

They contributed—this painted fleet—spots of color almost alarmingly bright in the dingy half tones of the art dealer's office. They were out of place there; as out of place as were their originals upon the real ocean, but for a different reason. Steam has driven canvas from salt water, and Ludvig, the art dealer, specialized, not in bright things like these, but in art of a nature much more restrained.

A dusty, moldy sort of place was Ludvig's. It had the air of an old bookshop. It was shabby. It was sordid, and full of sordid sounds and odors—the rumbling of street cars, the distant thunder of the Elevated; cooking smells, garlic, corned beef and cabbage, heavy Hungarian stews. Then there was the smell of old paints, too. In all, rather drab smells, and rather drab sounds.

The tall young artist thrust his big brown hands into his trousers pockets, and rocked to and fro on his heels, as he ran his eyes along that fleet of bright ships.

"Ludvig," he said, energetically, and with a sparkle of good humor in his fine blue eyes, "it is a very curious thing how I came to paint these ships. It will amuse you, I am sure. The reason I painted these ships is because I need money. I must have money. I am sick and tired of starving to death. So I have painted ships, a nice, clean-cut line of old-fashioned sailing ships. That's what the public wants. Right?"

"Yes, Mr. Bernard, you are quite right," the dealer agreed. "The public has gone mad over sailing ships."

"And it is a mighty curious thing, how I stumbled upon that piece of information," Mr. Bernard, the artist, continued. "A friend of mine writes the clever captions you read in the rotogravure section of the

Sunday Star. He also selects the photographs to be run. He has made a lifelong study of what the public likes and what it doesn't like. Now, the public's first preference is for beautiful girls, with beautiful figures with hardly any clothes on. You'd be surprised, Mr. Ludvig, how the dear old public likes its photographs of bathing beauties. It's a strange thing, isn't it, Mr. Ludvig?"

"Not at all," said the dealer; "but go right on."

"Well, as you know, Mr. Ludvig, my attempts at painting the female form divine, with or without clothing, have not been anything to write home about, have they? No, the female form divine has a trick of escaping my genius."

"You painted your ladies too photographically," Ludvig explained. "You left too little to the imagination. Not one mole, one dimple, one eyelash, did you leave to the onlooker's imagination."

The artist considered him thoughtfully, then looked back with some pride at his fleet of painted sailing ships.

"I am a man of considerable resource," he went on. "Since I could not paint bathing beauties, because of my love for exact detail, I must paint the next most popular subject. What is the next most popular subject—do you know, can you guess, Mr. Ludvig?"

"Ships?" Mr. Ludvig hazarded.

"Ships," the artist concurred. "My rotogravure supplement friend tells me that, next to the bathing beauty, the most popular subject is a ship with all sails set, running before a good stiff breeze. So, for the last four months, Mr. Ludvig, I have been painting these canvases. I know that I will never become a great artist. But if I can paint ships forever, and make a fortune, I will not complain."

"Naturally," Mr. Ludvig agreed.

"I want the material things of life. I want a nice apartment, full of luxurious furniture. I want a good foreign car, something to burn up the roads with, Mr. Ludvig. I want a valet. I want fine clothes. I want a place in the country. I want a speed boat. I want to travel on ocean liners."

"I don't blame you," Mr. Ludvig admitted readily.

"I want elegance, Mr. Ludvig, and I am going to buy it with my canvases of ships. I have poured my soul into these,

Mr. Ludvig. They are the best, the very best, I can do."

"Let me see," Mr. Ludvig remarked. "There are, here, twenty-one canvases, unless I have counted them wrong."

"There are twenty-one canvases," the artist affirmed.

"And how much do you expect to sell them for?"

The artist smiled. "The large ones for a thousand, the small ones for five hundred. Ten are large and eleven are small. The total is fifteen thousand and five hundred dollars. To be sure, there is your commission to be deducted. It has taken me four months to knock out fifteen thousand dollars' worth of art. Not bad, eh? That means I should gross about sixty thousand a year. Well, what do you think?"

"I think," Mr. Ludvig replied, "that if you can sell these canvases for fifteen dollars apiece, on an average, you will be doing very well."

Cromwell Bernard sat down heavily in the nearest chair and looked at Mr. Ludvig reproachfully.

"Stop kidding me," he said. "A sense of humor is a great asset, but you should always bear in mind that an artist is very sensitive about his brain children. Those twenty-one canvases are my brain children, Mr. Ludvig, and I will not be kidded about them. Now, let's put all kidding aside."

"If I ever had a sense of humor," the art dealer announced, "it withered and died when I was a very small boy. I am not in the kidding business, Mr. Bernard. I have been watching your work ever since you moved into this neighborhood. I wish I could tell you that it is improving. I wish I could say, 'Yes! These are great! They will fetch a thousand easily; maybe more.' But how can I say that when it is not the truth?"

"Am I as rotten an artist as all that?" the young man groaned.

"Mr. Bernard, you do not seem to have the fire, or the spark, or whatever it is. You have not caught the idea of the sailing ship. You did not catch the idea of the beautiful woman. There is something lacking. There are a great many things lacking. Really, Mr. Bernard, these ships of yours are like German lithographs. They are too bright. I will put them in the window, if you insist. You know, Mr. Bernard, I am saying this—"

"I understand perfectly," the artist interrupted. "Oh, well, art is long and life is short. Nope, I don't want you to put them in the window. I'll take your word for it. Don't sympathize with me. I am not the least bit discouraged."

But he was discouraged. Ludvig knew bad art at sight as well as he knew genius, and nothing would delight him more than to arrange for an exhibition of good work in one of the Fifth Avenue galleries. But—German lithographs!

II

WITH the bundle of canvases under his arm, Cromwell Bernard strode back to his studio. He had a very nice smile, but he found little use for it during that walk.

Dog-gone it, why couldn't he paint? These other young fellows he had known at art school—look at them! Doing illustrations and covers for the big magazines, doing pictures for the soap companies, the plumbing companies, the automobile manufacturers; living luxuriously.

He had shown just as much talent as Dean Cornwall or Clark Fey or Harry Davitt, and look how they had forged ahead! Not one of them was making less than fifty thousand a year! And he was—starving! Couldn't paint bathing beauties; couldn't paint sailing ships.

Bernard lived to a great extent in his imagination, as all creative people do. Now, as he strode back to his studio, he carried himself as if he were really coming from some place and going somewhere. Looking at him, you would have thought: "Now, there is a brisk, successful young fellow. There isn't a drop of fear in him. The world is his oyster, all right, all right."

That was the impression that Bernard strove to convey—a successful young artist on his way to his luxurious studio; in a hurry to get there to slap more paint on canvas. It would be a magnificent studio, with old tapestries on the walls, and Spanish renaissance furniture grouped about; a model stand draped with black velvet; fine bits of color that he had picked up here and there—a Brangwyn, flat and dusky, a Gauguin, a Picasso, a few Matisse.

Bernard briskly climbed the four flights of stairs to his studio, and there, with the door closed, he looked about him. This is what he saw:

Near the large north window stood his easel, blackened with age and lacquered

with paint that he had dropped. Against one wall was a paintless dresser. Across from it, against the other long wall, was his cot.

There was little else in the room—a few odds and ends of cheap furniture, a soap box full of discarded paint tubes and brushes, a homemade set of shelves, where he kept his books, a stack of old canvases. There was no rug on the floor.

"After all," he thought, humorously, "there is no place like home."

He unwrapped his proud fleet. It occurred to him that Ludvig might have been wrong in his estimation.

But, no. Ludvig was never wrong. Ludvig knew good art from bad art.

The glamour of the last four months was suddenly stripped from Cromwell Bernard's eyes; and he saw his paintings as they really were. German lithographs—too bright, too hard. They looked cheap!

He grasped the portrait of a merchantman with billowing white sails, cleaving a path along an azure sea. Deftly, he thrust the toe of his right shoe through the gleaming black hull.

In turn, he demolished the twenty-one ships. He kicked holes in them all. Then he kicked the ruined canvases about the studio.

Finally he kicked them all into a corner, and jumped on them until nothing remained of the proud fleet but splinters of wood and a large shapeless ball of canvas.

Five precious years of his life he had given to the smearing of oil paint on canvas. If he had only taken that job in his uncle's tannery, he would now be driving his own motor car.

His uncle had washed his hands of him. There was no place for Bernard to turn.

"I am twenty-nine," the young man mused. "As an artist, I would make a fine ditch digger. I am virtually nothing but a bum. The other men of my profession, who started when I did, are painting snappy portraits, and knocking out illustrations, and rolling in dough. It's a hell of a world, and I think I will jump out of the window."

He walked to the window. It was closed, but, even so, he could look down into the street. What a sordid street it was! The scene was full of pushcarts, and dirty kids, and gabbling, gossiping, slatternly women.

He had not looked down very often into the street. He preferred to live in a land

of his own creation, where he became the successful artist, the man who had made good in a big way.

There he was, the guest of honor at functions. He was sought after. He was consulted by the younger men of his profession, the way Harry Raleigh and Harvey Dunn were.

The window yielded as he leaned despondently against it. It flew open on its creaking hinges.

Bernard stepped back hastily, with a grunt of alarm. Then he looked out and down.

Well, why not? They would say he had been drunk, but what of that? Drunkenness was no longer a disgrace; it was a sign that you had money in your pocket.

Bernard rumbled his curly blond hair, and looked down again, estimating the distance, imagining how astonished those pushcart venders and gabbling women would be when his body came hurtling down into their midst.

Then he looked across the way. He grunted again, but not in dismay. He smiled. He involuntarily straightened his shoulders.

There was a face pressed against the window across the way. It was a girl's face. It was the most beautiful face Cromwell Bernard had ever seen; an oval, as white as the petals of an Easter lily.

Her eyes were dark, and much too large. Her hair was walnut brown; bobbed short. She was staring at him.

"Well!" the artist said, softly, to himself. "You don't tell me! Well, I declare! Can it be true?"

His heart was hammering pleasantly. He grinned at that most beautiful girl. Life was not yet entirely emptied of its possibilities.

III

THE girl was gazing intently at Cromwell Bernard, but the artist knew, by the unfocused look of her eyes, that she did not see him. She, too, was toying with her dreams.

Perhaps she was thinking of jumping out of her window! You never could tell.

He looked at the girl with greater interest. She was not, as he had first believed, simply one of these milk-white beauties. There were discolorations under her eyes; her lips were colorless; her pallor might well be that of sickness.

Certainly, here was a soul even more at odds with the world than his own. Why, he demanded, should such a beautiful girl be so blue? Was she ill? Obeying a boyish impulse, he waved his hand.

His gesture attracted the girl's attention. She now was staring at him with calm, incurious eyes.

Bernard smiled again, but she did not respond. She shifted her eyes to some distant cloud, and her lips remained compressed in that forlorn line.

"Is that so?" Bernard remarked, softly. "I am going to make you smile, my proud beauty! I am going to make you smile if it kills me, my tenement lily!"

There was a pad of large drawing papers on top of the odds and ends in the soap box. He sharpened a charcoal pencil.

Then he began to draw in rapid strokes. The thing swiftly took form. It represented a cat, startled, with arched back and distended tail. It was a most terrified-looking feline.

Bernard wasted no time on detail. He sketched the frightened cat swiftly and without hesitation. Then he held the sheet so that the girl across the way could see it.

The beautiful creature rewarded his efforts with another incurious stare. She looked at the frightened cat, scrutinized it in some detail, and then her glance drifted away to the distant cloud, or the top of the skyscraper, or whatever it was that intrigued her so.

"The devil you say!" Bernard growled. "This is a funny-looking cat. It's a darned funny-looking cat. I fear that you lovely maiden lacks a sense of humor."

He tried again. This time he drew a pushcart man—old Beefy, the tinware merchant. When he had finished the drawing, he held it up so that the girl across the street could see. Again she looked, examined, remained indifferent, and coldly glanced away.

Before dusk had set in, Bernard had held up at his window no less than ten sketches, all supposed to be killingly funny. Not once did the beautiful girl smile; not a single time did she display even the slightest interest. Always her eyes returned to whatever it was that interested her up in the air.

That night Bernard went to bed with the grim determination that he would woo a smile to the lips of that stubborn beauty.

But before he retired he made some inquiries, and what he found out about the girl astonished him.

There were, it was reported, two girls living over there in that tenement room; two sisters. One was Betty and one was Laura; one was ill and one was well.

The one who was ill, the Betty one, stayed at home in that shabby, cheerless room, day after day. Laura went out and worked as a clerk in a store.

It had not always been thus, the artist learned. Until about a year ago the two sisters had been rich girls, the daughters of a father who appeared to have all the money in the world. He had suddenly died, and left more debts than dollars.

The girls had been thrown on their own resources. Both had found work, but Betty, after a few months of it, had fallen ill. Laura was now supporting her, and they were having a pretty hard time making ends meet.

Bernard caught a glimpse of Laura at her window that night before he retired. She was a very tired-looking blond girl.

He thought it was a shame that two such nice girls should suffer this way. It was pretty tough being poor, but it was much tougher being rich and having everything, and then suddenly becoming poor. Penniless persons who had once been rich were the ones you ought to feel sorry for; people who had been poor all their lives didn't know what they were missing.

Bernard was in the same boat himself, in a manner of speaking, and he knew how hard it was to give up a pleasant, comfortable life and live in the slums. But he had done it from choice; he had wanted to prove that he could make his own way in the world. These girls had had poverty thrust upon them.

Betty Walters had been ill for months. The doctors did not know just what the trouble was. One doctor said one thing, and another doctor said another. The cruel fact remained that Betty Walters was wasting away.

She had little interest in her food, and she was growing weaker and weaker. It had been weeks, now, since she had left that tenement room, and lately she had taken to sitting at the window, just looking at the sky.

Bernard fairly boiled when he heard all this. Why couldn't that beautiful girl go out to the country where she belonged? It

was a crying shame to keep her cooped up in that dingy little room like this.

Of course, her sister couldn't afford to send her to the country. But where were the two girls' old friends? Perhaps the sisters were too proud to let their old friends know how far they had fallen.

It seemed a shame. Something ought to be done about it.

"A girl like that Betty," Bernard said to himself, "ought to be looked after. She is one of these beautiful creatures who don't know how to adjust themselves to the sharp edges of life. Well, they oughtn't to have to try, by gosh! She contributes enough to the world by just being beautiful. Gee, if I were only a real artist! What a picture I could paint of that gal! Talk about your Mona Lisas!"

But he wasn't an artist; he was only a dub.

"Well, anyhow, I will make that girl smile," was his last waking thought.

IV

NEXT morning he waited at his window until almost ten before Betty Walters appeared, as pale as ever, as sad as ever—a tenement princess who found some melancholy pleasure in gazing endlessly at something in the sky.

Cromwell Bernard drew pictures with a feverish energy, drawing on all the neighborhood for subjects, trying to be funny, determined to be funnier. Six of them he exhibited to the beautiful, indifferent girl before noon, and not once did he arouse a spark of interest or the shadow of a smile.

At noon, Bernard hastened to Ludvig's and purchased another block of charcoal paper. He bolted his lunch so rapidly that he suffered all afternoon from indigestion, and he worked harder than ever, and tried to be funnier.

It was nearly dusk again when his feverish efforts were finally rewarded. To be sure, the reward was meager, but at least Betty Walters did respond. The drawing was the most foolish of them all. It portrayed Nicoli Ventasimo, grinding away at his hurdy-gurdy which played so often beneath Betty's window.

Betty Walters, in the purpling light, stared at the drawing. She was really interested. The shadow of something that may have been the ghost of a smile momentarily hovered about her lips—and was gone. She looked away at her cloud.

"Oh, dog-gone that cloud!" the artist growled.

Almost at once, Betty was looking back again at the drawing of Nicoli Ventasimo.

Bernard waved at her excitedly, and laughed. He was perspiring. No great artist had ever worked harder for the applause of kings and their mistresses than had Cromwell Bernard for that slight acknowledgment from this pale girl.

The crumb of encouragement made him anxious to try to be even funnier. His ambition became exalted. He would not only make Betty smile; he would make her laugh out loud!

Next day the young lady was at her casement early, and she was looking over at Cromwell Bernard's window when he appeared. Her face seemed to brighten when he came into view, and not once did she take her eyes from the charcoal sketch, in favor of that remote thing in the sky.

The third drawing, that morning, won a smile—an actual smile. It was a timid, rather frightened smile; but, at least it was a smile. Her white teeth glistened a little in the morning sunlight.

She smiled again when Bernard exhibited his next drawing. The smiles were coming more and more easily.

She even smiled now at some of the pictures which she had previously scanned so indifferently. But not once that day did she laugh.

"I'll show her," Bernard said grimly. "That girl isn't going to put anything over on me!"

And he continued, day after day, making these funny drawings for Betty Walters to smile at—if she would. And the beautiful girl across the way smiled. She smiled more and more readily. And once she *laughed!*

And one day he heard news that made him feel so proud that his chest threatened to burst. It was really preposterous.

Word had filtered out into the neighborhood that Betty Walters was getting better. Nobody knew what had caused it, but the fact existed that she was taking a real interest in food again, and was growing stronger every day.

"My drawings, rotten as they are, are doing this!" Cromwell Bernard crowed mentally. "I guess I'm not as useless as I thought I was. Not so dusty! Not so dusty! Anybody who can yank a beautiful girl back from the edge of the grave is

pretty hot stuff. Art is long and life is short, huh? Well, her life would have been a whole lot shorter if it hadn't been for my bum art!"

If it had not been for Betty, he would have gone out and got himself extremely drunk the evening he heard this good news. But, somehow, it was hard to reconcile the girl with the great dark eyes with that kind of celebration.

Somehow, he felt that she had given him just as much as he had given her. Maybe he had saved her from an untimely grave, but hadn't she saved him, too? Wasn't he on the very verge of leaping out of his window the day he first saw her, and hadn't her moonlight type of beauty held him back?

Besides that, she was the first enthusiastic critic he had ever had. Terrible as his art was, it had made her laugh.

Well, wasn't that applause? One of these days, when he knew that she was well on the road to recovery, he would tackle his painting with new zeal.

New zeal? Yes, Cromwell Bernard was fairly boiling over with renewed ambition. Somehow, for some curious reason, he believed, sensed, *knew*, that he was finding himself at last.

He didn't know what he was going to paint when he started in again; certainly not bathing beauties or merchantmen. He would have to find out from his friend, the rotogravure editor, what was the third most popular subject.

He needed money now as he had never before needed it. Heretofore his hunger for wealth had been a purely selfish one. He had wanted fine clothes, an imported car, a valet, rare foods, a luxurious apartment, a yacht, and so on. Every wish had been a selfish wish.

Now he wanted money for something else entirely. He wanted to help Betty Walters. He wanted, in few but devastating words, to marry Betty Walters, and live happily ever after.

You will have to admit now that Cromwell Bernard was a man of considerable imagination. In his mind, everything was arranged. They would move from these smelly slums to a white cottage, covered with honeysuckle, or wistaria, or lilacs, or something equally fragrant.

They would have a view of Long Island Sound, and they would raise things in a garden. The bloom of radiant girlhood is

would return to Betty's pale cheeks, and he would adore her forever.

Just when Cromwell decided that he would marry Betty will never be known. He fell in love with her painlessly. One minute he was not in love with her, and the next he was. He sometimes believed love was born the instant he laid eyes on her.

Over and over, he said to himself: "I have got to make a lot of money. She is used to nice things, and she is positively going to have them, if I have to work my fingers to the bone for her."

He thought of writing to his uncle, and pleading for a job in the tannery, but his æsthetic sense shied away from that. A girl as exquisite as Betty would never in this wide world love a husband who came home at night smelling of rancid leather. What *could* he do?

V

MEANWHILE, life drifted along more and more pleasantly. Every morning he went to his window as briskly as if he were going to work and getting paid real money for it. He seized his drawing board, tacked down a sheet of paper; grasped his charcoal pencil, and fell to work. What a stack of funny pictures was accumulating before him!

"Hello, Betty!" he would call across the roar in the street below.

"Hello!" her answer would come faintly across the bedlam of sidewalk hawkers and hurdy-gurdies and gossiping, slovenly women.

Oh, they were above all that. They were in the clouds, laughing together over the silly pictures he drew. Whistling, Bernard went at his work. Never in his life had the young man been so happy, so utterly care-free.

Betty was getting better. Anybody could see that. Her eyes were growing brighter. The dark places under them were going—going—gone! Color was coming into her cheeks. Occasionally her face was almost pink.

She grew lovelier and lovelier. And she was smiling almost all the time now. No matter what Bernard held up to the window, Betty smiled or laughed, and often she waved her hand.

The artist contemplated that hand whenever it appeared. It was a slim, small, beautiful hand. It was never fash-

ioned for toil. It was meant to be waved to him.

He talked to her often. Of course, he spoke in a low tone, and the uproar in the cañon below them made it impossible for her to hear anything this side of a good lusty shout, but he talked none the less. They were always one-sided conversations, and they ran along these lines:

"You have really given me an interest in life, darling. Before I saw your lovely face, I didn't care what happened to me. I was merely a drifter. But since you came into my life, all has changed. I adore you! You are the light of my life! I am going to make barrels of money, and give you everything in the world."

He could talk like this by the hour. He imagined that he was rehearsing what he would say when, some day, they actually met and stood or sat only a few feet apart. He would waste mighty little time, would Cromwell Bernard. He would take her masterfully by that slim, white hand, and he would say:

"Listen, Betty! You don't mind if I call you Betty, do you, Betty? I love you! One of these days, God willing, you will love me. Until then, I will wait. I will be patient."

And so on—always bold—always certain of himself. He would give her plenty of chances to say yes.

And one morning, to his dismay, the beautiful girl did not appear at her accustomed post. Was she ill again? Was she, perhaps, in bed, deathly sick, with no one near?

His concern was reaching the stage of acute panic, when a firm tap occurred on his door.

He rushed over to open it. He flung it open.

In walked Betty Walters.

"Hello, there!" she said, breezily.

VI

SOMETHING like that is bound to happen to a dreamer. Reality is so seldom like the dream.

Betty Walters was not bold, nor, certainly, was she a timid little thing. Here was no lily of the tenements, but a brisk, crisp girl, with a mind of her own.

Cromwell Bernard was not disappointed, but he was terribly astonished. Words deserted him. The speech he had rehearsed so thoroughly left him, never to

return. As he stared at the lovely creature, his hands grew and grew until they became as large as footballs.

She was more beautiful than he had supposed. Her coloring was enchanting. Her eyes were positively pools of dark delight.

He gulped. He tried to say something. All he achieved was a complicated grin that seemed to involve his elbows and his feet.

"You're Mr. Bernard, are you not?" she got out in a clear, firm, singing sort of voice.

"Why—uh—yump," he replied.

"Well, I'm the girl who lives on the top floor across the way, you know. I'm Betty Walters."

"Oh, yes!" he exclaimed, as if he wouldn't have recognized her at once, anywhere, forever.

"I've been so interested in your drawings," she went on in that caroling voice.

"Oh, yes," he repeated. He began to blush. He knew he should ask her to be seated, and there was nothing on which to sit, except the cot, which was piled high with things, and not made, as usual.

"You know," she said, with a delicious air of confiding in him, "you saved my life."

"No!" he groaned.

"Oh, but you did! I used to sit over there, day after day, not caring a darn whether I lived or not. I don't know what was the matter with me, but I do know that there wasn't any interest in life."

"Oh—er—I—" he began, brilliantly; but she went on:

"You see, we're pretty hard up, my sister and I, and things looked pretty messy to me. I couldn't see any way out. I didn't want to marry some fat rich man I didn't love, and there was nothing I could do, and I'd sort of given up hope, and I lost the wish to live and all that. And then you began showing me those drawings, and I got the idea that saved my life."

"Did you?" he blurted.

"I realized that what I'd wanted to do all along was to take up drawing. I don't know if I have any talent or not, but you gave me the idea that I could at least try."

Bernard hardly heard what she was saying. Gone was the remainder of the illusion! It hadn't, after all, been his funny drawings that had saved her life. Any-

thing drawn on a sheet of paper would have turned the trick. He had given her nothing, after all.

"And I was wondering," she was saying, "if I couldn't wheedle you into telling me how to go about it. I want to learn to draw. Won't you give me lessons in the art?"

"Why—why, I'd love to!" he exclaimed. "Of course, I don't know much about art, as a matter of fact. The truth is, I'm a pretty bum artist. I've been painting for years, and my stuff is pretty bad."

"Of course, I'll be delighted to tell you all I know. It won't take long to do that," he added bitterly.

She looked at him curiously, with bright, round eyes.

"Life is short and art is long," she said.

"Yes," he agreed. "I've been living on that old wheeze ever since I left art school. Well, let's not discuss me. Sure, I'll give you lessons."

"I want to learn charcoal drawing," Betty informed him. "I like it better than any other kind. Will you tell me just what materials to get?"

"For charcoal drawing?" he repeated. "Why, this kind of paper will do, and these pencils are very good; but it isn't important to use just these. Almost any kind of paper will do, and there are many kinds of charcoal."

"I'd rather," the girl declared, "use just the kind you do. Does the little art dealer down the street carry them?"

"Yes; Ludvig carries them."

"Can I see some of these drawings you've been making for me?" Betty asked.

"Look at them? You can have them."

"I'd like some," she admitted. "I think they're terribly amusing. And I'd like to take a sample to show Ludvig the kind of paper I'll need."

He rolled the drawings and tied the roll with a cord and handed it to her, without another word. She went, and left him to his ponderings.

She wasn't the kind of girl he had thought she was, but he loved her more than ever. Never had he been so fussed. Never had he been so tongue-tied, so awkward, so gawkish.

"Oh, hell!" Bernard said to himself, some time after the door had closed behind that gallant, small figure. "What's the use?"

He meant, what was the use of being in love with a girl who was miles above you, and what was the use of trying to be an artist when the fates were against you.

VII

THE object of his unquenched adoration was meanwhile proceeding briskly down the street, with the roll of drawings under her arm.

She turned in at Ludvig's, and waited while that grim old gentleman concluded the sale of a Currier and Ives print to an equally grim looking old lady. When the customer had gone, Betty slipped the cord off the roll of drawings, to spread them out on the counter.

Mr. Ludvig was looking at her, and not at the upmost drawing. He had never seen Betty Walters before, but he knew that she was almost too beautiful to be human.

"Do you know an artist named Cromwell Bernard?" she asked, breathlessly.

"I know him," Mr. Ludvig replied. "Yes, I know Bernard. But he is not much of an artist. First, he paints bathing beauties that are not bathing beauties, then he paints ships that are German lithographs. He is a nice boy. He is a fine, clean boy, but he is not an artist. Why do you ask?"

"I want to know what you think of these drawings," Betty answered.

As she spoke, a man sauntered into the shop. He was a short, thickset man, with a square jaw and hard black eyes. He wandered up to the counter just as Mr. Ludvig dropped his gaze from the girl's lovely face to the drawings.

"These," Mr. Ludvig said, "are very interesting. Very interesting, indeed. Who drew them?"

"He drew them!" Betty announced, almost in a gasp.

"Not Bernard!"

"Yes, Bernard! Aren't they funny? Don't you think they're terribly funny?"

"Of course, they are terribly funny, but here is a gentleman who can tell you much more about funny drawings than I can. This is Mr. Donaldson. He is the comic art editor of the *Morning Star*. What do you think of these drawings, Mr. Donaldson? Funny, aren't they?"

Betty watched the comic art editor as he bent over to examine the drawings. She watched his eyes, for eyes, as you well

know, are the windows of the soul, and she wanted to know just what went on in his soul.

Apparently nothing went on in Mr. Donaldson's soul; at least, nothing very encouraging. He looked first at one drawing, then at another, and as he looked and looked, his face seemed to grow sadder and sadder, his eyes bleaker and bleaker. Finally, it seemed as if he must be on the verge of bursting into tears.

And then he suddenly wheeled on Betty Walters.

"Who drew these things?" he snarled.

"A—a friend of mine," she faltered.

"Don't you think they're funny?"

He looked at her without answering. He looked at her with keen interest, as if he had forgotten that anything else in the world existed. Men often looked that way when they gazed at Betty Walters. She was used to that kind of flattery. The windows of his soul now permitted a number of secrets to escape.

"So you are a friend of his, are you?" he mumbled presently. "Well, let's run up and see him. Can you spare the time? Or just give me his address."

"Oh, I have loads of time," she breathed. She grabbed the pile of drawings and hastily rolled them up.

"This way," she called from the door.

Cromwell Bernard was again at work with charcoal and paper when they came up the stairs. Mr. Donaldson was puffing and wheezing from the climb, and Betty Walters was bright-eyed and pink-cheeked with excitement.

The artist hid the drawing he was making by hurriedly turning the drawing board to the wall.

"This is Mr. Donaldson, the comic art editor of the *Morning Star*," Betty introduced the stout man. "He's very much interested in your drawings. I hope you don't mind my bringing him up. I know you're awfully busy doing the illustrations for those automobile ads, but I do hope you can spare the time!"

Cromwell Bernard looked more and more dazed. What automobile ads? Had his light of love gone crazy?

"I was wondering," Mr. Donaldson said, "if you'd care to do a daily cartoon for us. It seems funny that I haven't heard of you before. These drawings of yours are pretty clever. Can you keep on doing them?"

"He can do them with his left hand!" the beautiful girl boasted. "He's frightfully clever."

"If you would care to consider a proposition," Mr. Donaldson remarked, "we can talk business."

"A proposition?" blurted the artist.

"Sure! I'll sign you up on a yearly contract."

"Well, we don't know," the princess of the tenement swiftly put in. "Mr. Bernard is pretty busy. What sort of a proposition would you make?"

"Five thousand a year," the art editor replied.

"Five thou—" Cromwell Bernard gulped. His eyes bulged.

Here, in the flesh, was a man offering him five thousand dollars a year. Manna from heaven! Miracles! He must be dreaming.

"It isn't enough," Betty stated, firmly.

Bernard stared at her with growing amazement. Here was his lily lady, his hothouse flower, dicking as shrewdly as the tenement housewives bargained with the pushcart venders.

"We might sweeten it a trifle," Mr. Donaldson admitted, grudgingly.

"Ten thousand!" Betty snapped.

"Let's make it seventy-five hundred the first year," the editor suggested, coldly. "Maybe we'll renew at ten if the stuff goes over."

"Seventy-five—" Bernard managed to say.

"Isn't enough, is it?" the beautiful girl cried.

"Enough!" he gurgled. "Why, say, honestly, no kidding, seventy-five hundred a year—"

"Isn't nearly enough," she hastily finished for him.

"Ten thousand," the art editor said, resignedly. "Let me take these along, will you? Come down this afternoon and sign the contracts. We can use a couple of dozen of these, and we'll talk over ideas later. I've got to be running along. Be down about three, will you, Mr. Bernard? Sorry I interrupted your work."

And, with the roll of drawings under his arm, the comic art editor of the *Morning Star* took his departure.

VIII

CROMWELL BERNARD sat down heavily on his cot as the door closed. He looked

dizzily about the studio. He looked dazedly at the girl.

She smiled, and sat down beside him.

"There, there," she said, in a soothing, crooning voice. "Everything is all right. The operation was a perfect success, and I think you are going to do very nicely."

"Ten thousand a year!" the artist moaned.

"Isn't it wonderful? Now you can have a nice studio, and everything will be just great."

"I don't understand it," he muttered.

"Well, I'll try to explain it to you," she said sweetly. "In the first place, I never had any intention of taking up drawing. I have just about as much artistic sense as a— a swordfish. I heard all about you long before you ever looked across the street and saw me at my window, pining away."

"You were pining away, weren't you?" he asked.

"Of course, I was pining away! What I told you a little while ago was quite true. I didn't have any interest in life, and I really didn't want to live. And when you began doing those drawings, I did get an interest in life. Oh, I knew all about you, Cromwell Bernard."

"You did?" he gasped.

"Yes! Everybody in the neighborhood has been feeling sorry for you for years! They know how hard you've been working, and what hard luck you've had; and when you first drew those pictures for me, why, right away I realized that, if you'd never hit it before, you were hitting it now."

"You did?" he repeated, brightly.

"Yes! It was wonderful the way it worked. Sick as I was, I nearly had hysterics when you showed me that first drawing, it was so funny. But I knew why you had drawn that picture, so I didn't laugh. And the more solemn I appeared, the funnier your drawings became. And finally I grinned, didn't I?"

"Yes, yes!"

"And you kept on drawing; and one day I laughed, didn't I?"

"You did!"

"And I realized that I was doing something worth while, after all. I was making you find your way, wasn't I?"

"Gee!" the artist replied.

"And when I once knew you were on the right track, I began thinking of ways

you could capitalize it. But I wanted to be sure. So I took your drawings on a pretext. I was going to take them around to all the newspaper comic art editors in New York. But luck played right into my hands, and Mr. Donaldson walked into Ludvig's just as I was showing him the drawings."

Betty sprang up, her eyes and mouth round with dismay.

"Did I make a mistake? Should I have held out for fifteen thousand? My judgment told me ten was the top figure."

He looked at her. And then he laughed and laughed.

"Honestly," he said, "you don't know how funny this is! All the time I thought you were a—a lily lady. I thought you were the kind of girl who needed protection; some one to keep you away from the sharp corners of life, and all that. And—and all the time, you were—"

"I knew that I had the makings of a hard-boiled business woman in me somewhere," his lily lady took him up. "And, thank Heaven, I have found some one to practice my talents on. I am going to go out and scout business for you. There's no reason why you won't have time to draw funny pictures for the comic weeklies, as well as to do your daily drawing for the *Star*. And you ought to get advertising work to do, too. There's no reason in the world why you shouldn't make twenty thousand your first year! What were you working on when I came in?"

Bernard started up from the cot at those words. He started hastily across the room toward the drawing board—but Betty reached it first.

He swooped down and tried to pluck the board from her hand, but she held it away. It contained, not a drawing, but a sheet of paper covered with large charcoal letters. They read:

WILL YOU BE MY ONE BEST BETTY?

The young lady considered this artistic triumph with large, glowing eyes.

"What," she inquired, "were you going to do with this?" She looked up at him, rallying. "Going to hang it out your window next time I looked over?"

"Well—" he said, and stopped.

"Then what?"

"Then what?" he hollowly echoed.

"Yes," she said, sternly. "Supposing I had nodded my head, or yelled 'yes' to you. What would you have done then?"

The future cartoonist was bewildered.

"Cromwell Bernard," she said, softly, "you need somebody like me around, to indorse your checks, to see that your bills are paid, and your socks are darned, and your buttons are sewed on, and that you eat your meals on time. The answer to your billboard is—"

She seized a charcoal pencil, and, in a large girlish scrawl, wrote under his big black lettering:

TRY TO STOP ME!

PERSEPHONE

I MET her at the top of summer days,

Gathering in haste blue flowers in a blue vale,

And loved her for her delicate ghostly ways,

Grave-candle eyes and cheeks unearthly pale.

"Why gatherest thou these flowers so fast?" I said.

"There grow not flowers like these," she spake, "in hell,

Nor grow they in the gardens of the dead,

Wrapt in their winding-sheets of asphodel."

But I, all weary of hot summer blooms,

Bent my gaze on her, following her feet,

Till at the last where hell's black portal glooms,

She stood, and smiled a smile exceeding sweet—

"Take me," I said, "to yonder pallid bowers,

Where aconite and deadly nightshade blow,

For I have gathered all my earthly flowers,

And whither thou goest I would also go."

Richard Le Gallienne

Gallery of Men

THE STORY OF A GIRL ARTIST WHO PAINTED HER SUITORS IN
THEIR HEARTS' BLOOD ON THE CANVAS OF FUTILITY

By Brooke Hanlon

IN Westover, love affairs budded quickly, bloomed into engagements in a short time, and became marriages within a year or two, at the outside. The case of Lilian Wentworth and Bill Howells was, therefore, exceptional.

It was 1916 when Westover began linking the name of its banker's daughter with that of William Gaines Howells, Jr. In 1926 he was still familiarly known as Lily's Bill.

Lilian was the spoiled beauty of Westover. At seventeen, the age at which she had first publicly appropriated Bill, she had been as imperious a slight blond person as could have been found in that part of the State.

At twenty-seven she was still spoiled, still imperious, and still beautiful. Westover, at least, thought Miss Wentworth beautiful at twenty-seven.

The eye of a connoisseur might have detected a slight fading of her delicate light loveliness, a hint of petulance lurking under the surface of her fragility. But Westover was not composed of connoisseurs, and was, moreover, accustomed to seeing its Wentworths through a haze. Old Andy Wentworth, the banker, had more money than any one else in town.

Lilian had travel, clothes, the finest fruits that could be found for her winter morning breakfasts, and a knot of exquisite flowers in a lapel of her suit, when she drove in one of her succession of long, low cars. Often as not, they were young Howells's flowers, pinned carelessly there in constant reminder to the town that Bill was, over a period of ten years, and in the face of countless discouragements, a Lilian Wentworth possession. Bill's was the distinction, in fact, of having the greatest

numerical representation in Lilian's gallery of men.

The Wentworth heiress, you see, was a collector of a sort. She went in for pictures. Not dead canvases in oils, accumulating dust through the years, were Lilian's, but flesh and blood tableaux flashed upon the mystic screen of her own thistle-down consciousness, and tenderly, reverentially laid away in the lavender-scented pages of her diaries.

Each picture showed two persons. The girl was always Lilian Wentworth; the man changed with the seasons, but was sometimes Bill Howells. A girl and a man—Lily and Reem Jennings—Lily and Noel Edwards—*Lily and Bill Howells*.

There were Lily and the golf champion in the summer; Lily and Jim Peters; Lily and a young playwright with a black ribbon to his glasses; *Lily and Bill Howells*; Lily and Ed Sears, the famous half back; *Lily and Bill Howells*.

Monotony? No, not that. Not in Lily's gallery, for she was an artist. Even when she had to fill in with inferior material, such as young Howells, she was an artist.

And Bill loved her. There was no room for doubt on that score. All Westover knew it. In Westover, the fact that Bill Howells loved Lilian Wentworth was as much to be taken for granted as that one breathed air, drank water, or played bridge on winter evenings.

It had begun when Bill was seventeen. Tramping in Hirsch's Grove on the afternoon of the day his mother was buried, he had come to a sudden realization of the futility of everything, including walking, and had stopped.

There hadn't been a lonelier moment in

young Howells's life up to that time, and it was, therefore, an opportune time for Lilian to come up on her smart riding horse. Before he had known he wasn't alone, she was beside him, and had his hand.

"Oh, Bill!" she'd said softly. "Oh, Bill Howells!" There was exquisite sympathy in her voice, and he had looked down from his awkward heights to see his own defiant, hard fought tears reflected in her upturned blue eyes.

"H'lo, Lily," he'd said with choked casualness, and his fate had been sealed from that moment.

He had had no way of knowing that the first picture was being hung in Lily's famous gallery. The picture—

Its background was banked in with soft, light-reflecting spring leaves. Its heroine was slim and tall for her fourteen years, in a new hunter's green riding costume. Its hero was tall and acceptable-looking even in his grief.

"Our eyes met through tears," Lily wrote in a round scrawl in her diary, and treasured the mental picture long after she had forgotten Bill and his loss. Bill, for his part, never forgot. He went home with reverence in his heart, reverence that had three years to ferment before the next picture in which he figured was to be hung in the gallery.

II

He went away to prep school, and later became a sophomore at one of the Eastern colleges. Grown taller, broader, and, in the eyes of Westover girls, even more attractive than ever, he had appeared at a Christmas dance and met Lilian Wentworth again. She had been breath-taking that night, seventeen having been a breath-taking age for Lily.

And Bill, with the glint of grooming on his fair hair, and the sparkle of cleanliness in his eyes, was ripe for a setting. The girl narrowed her blue eyes at him, recognized a new subject, and experienced the ecstatic shiver of an artist.

"Bill!" She had his hand, and was looking up at him again out of miraculous blue depths—"Bill Howells!"

Bill, mysteriously back in Hirsch's Grove, with the most authentic emotion of his adolescence, felt his big hands tremble as he stared at her with steadfast, wondering eyes. For three years he had held

a memory of her in a sort of shrine, and here she was!

But see the diary description of Lily's picture:

Bill Howells was at the dance. He is home from college and really is good-looking, though not in that slim, dark way—like Noel Edwards. I simply could not get rid of him all evening, but I didn't really mind, for every one kept trying to take him away from me.

But I must tell about after we got home. The fire was dying down in the library—I always think that's a sort of romantic time. I had on my cornflower blue taffeta, and knelt down on the gold cushion—I always keep it right there—to stir the fire.

Bill knelt down, too, to take the tongs from me, and there we both were, looking into the flames, with his hand over mine. I got up finally, but he still held my hand and kissed it. He said it had been wonderful to have me with him all evening and he didn't see how he was going away again so soon, and I must promise to come to the house party in February.

Well, that was all there was to that, though I guess he'll think several times of us kneeling together there in the firelight with the flames playing on my hair and eyes—cornflower blue they are, Reem Jennings said, or did I write that before? The dress is becoming, anyway.

I don't imagine many girls think of settings and backgrounds the way I do, but I always think it's important to give a man something to remember when he's away from you. Any man, I mean, though this Bill Howells may be a nuisance, I can see. Fortunately, he's away at school.

And the diary, that next February, went on record with the following:

I'm back from the Deke house party, the one Bill Howells invited me to. Something stuffy happened, but it turned out all right in the end. I rather dropped Bill for an Argentine chap—a girl doesn't have a chance to meet a good-looking South American, and with money, too, every day in the week!

Bill sulked, of course, and the fraternity brothers looked at me as though I had committed some crime. It turned out all right, however, for the last morning I had a headache and didn't go down to breakfast, and, fortunately, Bill brought my tray up. I had on a new green negligee with fluted gold lace collar that stands up about my neck, and gold slippers, and when I stood in the sun by the window, I really looked rather well, so I arranged a mirror to throw the sun toward the door, so that when I opened it for Bill—though, of course, I thought it might perhaps be Mario—I knew he would be impressed.

It seemed he was, for he couldn't say anything for a minute; then he said, stiffly: "I hope it isn't very bad, Lily," meaning my head, and I said, rather quickly, I thought, considering I had been half expecting Mario: "I haven't slept at all, Bill," and put my hand on his arm. I thought I might as well make up with him, for the Deke crowd is a nice crowd.

He said: "You're like a flower, Lily," and I knew by the way he touched my hair that the

sun was shining right on it and everything was all fixed up with Bill. So I wouldn't let Mario come to the station, but he sent a messenger to the train with huge roses. I love people who can think of spectacular things like that to do. It seems Bill is rather popular here, though.

"Bill Forgives Lilian," might, indeed, have been the title for many a picture that took its place in the gallery as time went on. The diary would report:

I knew Bill was smoking on the side veranda of the clubhouse, and, of course, I can't spare him altogether, so I cut my dance with Mr. With-erow to go out there. It was perfectly pitch black, and the only way I could find Bill was by his cigarette. "I've missed you, Bill," I said in a low voice, and didn't say another word for ages, and neither did he. "Give me a light," I said, then, for I wanted him to see the tears on my cheeks.

I had thrown the cerise scarf with gold roses and fringe over my shoulders. The match sputtered a gold light there in that inky blackness, and I leaned back against the white pillar and looked at Bill. He dropped the match in a hurry, all right.

He just said "Lily" twice, with his hands on my shoulders, and I knew by his voice it was all right, and I can have him help me take care of Marion when she comes next week. Certainly Gerald, Fitz, and the others aren't as reliable.

Oh, yes—he said something else. "I thought it would be better for me to give you up, Lily," he said. "But I can't," he said, too. "I can't, Lily." I don't remember what I said. When I came home I darkened my room and fixed the scarf again and cried a little more. I lighted a match and looked at myself in the mirror. It certainly was effective.

I do feel sorry for Bill, but I don't think he'll sulk that way soon again, just over a matter of not being able to see him for a couple of weeks.

Pictures— Pictures—

III

BILL's first proposal and Lilian's rejection of it were pictures to her. She had been sweet that night.

"No, Bill—" Every word had been the shutting of a door for him. "Why, Bill—"

She had laughed a tenderly modulated merriment, her eyes straying to a new picture taking form and color in that gallery of men, her every sense alert for the right perspective, the right shading. Here were the dead stillness and the warm scents of a July night in Westover; her hands, white, white, creeping to Bill Howells's shoulders; Bill's eyes.

She had shivered ecstatically at the perfection of the canvas. It was clever of Bill to have picked such a night. Words

were just the soft music that the hanging of a masterpiece deserves.

"Dear, you're just out of school—"

"It's a good offer, Lily. Everybody is congratulating me. You—you'd love the West, Lily." Bill's voice was encountering difficulties in his throat.

"Dearest, you know we have ages and ages—"

"I can't go out there without you, Lily." Bill's were not the trite words of ordinary lovers. He literally could not again go away from the town that held Lily Wentworth.

"Stay—goose!" She patted his cheek, her hand whiter than ever in the moonlight, ethereally white. "I"—a minor chord in the music—"I don't want you to go so far away."

"You mean, Lily—you mean you'd mind if I went?"

"You wouldn't think of going if you cared for me." Lily's senses were in a creative swoon, and her voice caught.

"Oh, Lily, if I cared!" He caught her hands from his shoulders. "I'll stay, Lily; I'll stay."

Lily sighed, and stretched her cool, slim body, kittenwise. It was over, that tableau she had planned, and she was fatigued, as any actress would have been who had thrown herself into a part. There remained only the letter description that went to a girl friend, the diary being laid away now with her first décolleté frock, the expensively bound books from Miss Heath's, and other souvenirs of her glamorous girlhood. The letter said:

Bill Howells asked me to marry him, and I refused without sending him away—it was a mood, I suppose. Of course, I knew it was coming, and was almost worn out with dressing up to it all this week he's been home.

Well, it just happened I had on that orchid and silver tissue you helped me buy at Norton's, in the spring. "They'll lose their senses over you in that," you said, or something equally unnecessary, but I don't suppose you even imagined anything more picturesque than last night, dear.

I wonder if you've ever been under a July moon, in our garden? I'd had my arms done by the Julie Beauty Shoppe here, some new sort of liquid preparation that makes them look simply wonderful and doesn't rub off, as powder will.

Well, if you can imagine Bill and me—he's really just made for evening dress, with that blond hair—and moonlight so thick that everything made shadows—

Pictures— Pictures— The light of Lilian's fancy played upon some of them

for one week—for two weeks. Others she forgot in a day or a moment.

IV

"I'LL stay, Lily," Howells had said in his choked young voice, that night in the garden. He stayed.

"William G. Howells, Jr.," appeared in black lettering on the frosted lower half of his father's big office window on Winslow Street, and Bill branched out into insurance and real estate. It was not at all the sort of thing he had intended, but—well—Lily would see things right in a short time, he felt sure.

She was busy being increasingly spoiled just now. Life for Lily at this time was a round of house parties, proms, week-ends here and there with fashionable friends from her expensive school—picturesque clothes, picturesque cars, picturesque friends.

Bill's father looked at him speculatively sometimes, and the town said "Poor Bill!" discreetly when it saw him reject one good offer after another. The town thoroughly liked Bill, and wanted success for him, and the town had come to know Lilian as a collector.

"She poses and poses!" wailed her competitors for the favor of Westover men. "I should think men would grow utterly sick of it."

"They don't know," others interrupted sorrowfully. "Men are like that. They think her sincere. They don't know any more about her tricks than—than Bill Howells does!"

And "Poor Bill!" some sympathetic person would invariably be moved to remark at this juncture.

Some men, of course, did learn in time. There were men who flirted with Lilian in summers—and in winters went on their way; men who drifted up to the very brink of an engagement, and backed down; men who learned that Lilian was a collector, first, and a woman afterward. There were such men, but Bill Howells was not one of them. Bill never learned.

He was up and then down in Lily's regard, and the times when his star was in the ascendant coincided peculiarly with the times when there was a dearth of eligible men in Westover. In the winter months he fared better than in summer, as a rule, for Westover was by way of being a summer resort, and slim golfing bachelors from

cities began gathering on its three matchless courses early in May.

Inevitably the best of them were introduced at the more exclusive country club, where Andy Wentworth was czar, and in summer Lily Wentworth sat pretty. Bill was usually relegated to the emergency shelf early in the spring.

He would hover hopefully about the sidelines, coming willingly when called, until the last leaf and the last vacationist had departed from Westover. He would come back then into first favor as naïvely grateful as a child released from a punishment it has not understood.

No one in Westover knew whether Bill's business suffered more in winter, when Lilian was calling on him to take her here, to take her there, to do this or that for her at all hours of the day or night; or in summer, when he went about for weeks in a sort of daze, a worried line between the boyish blue eyes that followed Lilian in her philandering among the summer men.

He learned to overcome that whipped-at-the-post aspect Lily herself had attributed to him in his sophomore days; but if you knew him well, you could guess that it was there, underneath. Bad enough were summers when Lily flitted from one man to another; far worse were seasons when she found a model so much to her taste that she concentrated upon him to such an extent that rumors of an engagement were rife in the town.

Winters, even, were not entirely free from torment. There was one February when confidential announcement of Lily's engagement came from North Carolina, while hints of a pending alliance trickled up from Florida several times.

"I wish she would marry," Laurette Givens often said. "He doesn't give himself a chance to know there are other girls in the world."

"It would be the best thing that could happen," her companion of the moment always agreed. "Of course he'd become interested in some one else then."

Getting Bill interested in some one else had been the object of well-meaning friends of his for many years. "I'm having Fay Sheridan, from Boston, for the holidays, Bill," young matrons got into a habit of saying. "She's as pretty as a picture. Do help me take care of her."

And Bill would show up dutifully, and would give such time as Lilian Wentworth

didn't command. But it was in vain that young hostesses cleverly gave point to the charms of visitors.

The scheme never worked, and gradually an undertone of hopelessness appeared in the voices of Bill's friends when they said, "If only he would become interested in some one else." Finally they did not say it at all any more.

You can see how things stood with Bill Howells and Lilian Wentworth in 1926, when she was twenty-seven and he was just turned thirty. He was still Lily's Bill.

He seldom, these days, rated a picture in the gallery. There were always new men. Lily attended a polo series with young Walter Vanderman—and Andy Wentworth paid for her costumes from England.

When Arthur Havens descended upon Westover for practice for the Davis cup, there flashed before the dazzled eyes of Westover as colorful a pageantry as they had yet seen, posed against the young millionaire sportsman's snow white imported car. When Dermot Richmond came fresh from Hollywood for a month in Rockview, he must often, in imagination, have heard the stentorian-voiced director's "Camera!" echoing in his ears.

Pictures— Pictures—

The early spring of 1926 framed some of them. It got to be April.

And then Eleanor James came back to Westover.

V

ON an evening early in the month, Lilian called Bill at his office. The hint of petulance was often reflected, these days, in her voice.

"Bill Howells," she accused, "you're not poking down there in that musty old office a night like this?"

"Well, Lily girl!" The accustomed heartiness of Bill's voice was shaken a little by gratified surprise.

"Well"—he settled down to glad communication of the news—"it just happens I am, Lily. A chap's looking in on his way up to Maine. He's bugs on small-town investments, you know. Giving me from the nine fifteen to the eleven fifty-eight—"

"Oh, business!" Hearing Lilian's voice, you could easily see the little face she was making into the transmitter.

Bill laughed a hearty, fond laugh. The

pleased surprise hadn't as yet entirely disappeared from his attractive big features.

When Bill met Lilian, or heard from her unexpectedly, especially at this time of the year, when summer men were beginning to come in, it was like a pebble being thrown into a quiet pool. An appreciative glow would appear in his eyes, and spread, it seemed, over his big person.

"What's up, Lily?" he asked one afternoon, indulgently.

"I want you to come up, and bring one of the boys for Adrienne."

"But, Lily, I thought Harve Olmes was driving over from Rockview."

"Bill, don't be tiresome. He was, but he isn't. He just phoned. You've got to come. I can't have a guest—"

"Lily"—a worried line appeared between Bill's eyes—"it's rather important, this deal. It's the car line from Westover to Rockview."

"You mean, Bill, you'd let me sit up here with a guest—"

"Certainly not, Lily!" The worried line deepened. "I'll send Rolf up for you."

She was silent.

"Honestly, dear"—speech came hard for Bill now—"if this car line business was a thing that I could trust Rolf to handle for me—"

He waited hopefully for her to speak. She didn't.

"I'll do this, Lily." He was still hopeful. "I'll take a little run out to the club and see who's there."

"Never mind, Bill." Her fragile, ice-tinkling voice could constrict his heart, even after ten years.

"Lily—"

"It's"—she introduced a studied quaver into her voice—"it's you I want, Bill." There was a faint lingering on the "you."

Bill's heart constricted again. "Well—all right!" His hearty voice softened. "All right, Lily girl."

Bill was a little worried that night, however. He wasn't getting ahead. Too many good things were passing him by. After all, he should have seen Hagen.

It was just about time for Hagen's train to leave, and they were driving home from Montrose Gardens when Lilian gave him a fleeting side glance. Perhaps it was time for a little treatment. She placed her hand gently on his arm.

"Bill!" Her voice was gentle, too.

"Yes." He looked down at her somewhat absent-mindedly. He could telephone to his young partner from Lily's home; see how he had made out.

"You seem—so far away, Bill."

It was unexpected, an overture from Lily. It was the pebble in the pond. A warm glow enveloped Bill as he grasped the wheel at the top and slid his arm in silence behind her slight shoulders.

"He's bad to-night." Her voice was hurt as she snuggled down against him.

"Why, Lily!" All thought of Hagen tumbled from his mind. "Lily girl!" His arm tightened about her. She yawned discreetly in its shelter.

"Bill," she told him, carelessly, at parting, "come for dinner to-morrow night. Eleanor James is home, you know. She'll be here, and father's bringing home Bayard Joyce."

He was holding her hand for a moment of farewell, and seemed not to have heard.

"You'll come, Bill?"

"Of course."

"It's *the* Bayard Joyce, Bill." Her body was vibrant suddenly. "Bayard Joyce!"

"Of the Imperial Motors," he commented, indifferently.

"Yes." Her eyes were looking past him, and there was a shine in them that he knew.

"Big fish, Lily." He smiled somewhat sorrowfully.

Her eyes came back to him. "Bayard Joyce," she said again, experimentally. "And Eleanor James," she added. "Gracious!" Her laughter tinkled falsely. "Why aren't you saying something? Why aren't you saying, 'Eleanor James! Back from Paris!' That's what they're all saying. As a matter of fact"—her laugh tinkled again—"she wasn't in Paris at all, but in the country. He was an artist."

"It'll be a rotten home-coming for her, at that." Bill remembered that Eleanor James's artist husband had died in France.

"Rotten? I don't see how it can be particularly rotten"—a note of jealous discontent appeared in Lily's voice—"with everybody saying, 'Have you seen Eleanor James? She's more beautiful than ever!' I don't see—"

"She isn't really beautiful"—Bill studied it out with his slow honesty—"it's just that she has a beautiful smile."

"Oh!" Lilian tapped impatiently with

her slipper for a moment. "Bill," she said then, pettishly, "why are you looking at me in that fashion?"

"How, Lily?"

"As though I were something beautiful that was just about to fall to pieces," she grumbled.

"Perhaps I'm looking at you as something beautiful that's out of my reach, Lily," he said, seriously.

"Oh, Bill! Not to-night." She was impatient. "Not that again."

"You haven't changed your mind about wearing my ring this summer, Lily?"

"Oh, dear!" She was airy, talkative. "It's late, Bill Howells." She smoothed the lapels of his coat. "You're not to talk about things like that—rings and things. Do take Bob home; he's boring Adrienne to death."

"But you'll think about it, Lily?"

"Think! Oh, Bill—think, on a night like this! Oh, dear—good night, Bill." There was a quick, disarming pressure of his hand.

Bill had to be satisfied. He went to rescue Adrienne's luckless escort.

VI

LILIAN had had the Wentworth home redecorated on her twenty-fifth birthday. Its massiveness was not only an effective background for her Watteau person, it was an interior which would have done credit to a community far more sophisticated than Rockview Road, Westover.

Bayard Joyce looked from Lily to her setting and back again, with a visible feeling of satisfaction. She was like a particularly delicate orchid set against—well, black walnut.

Bill Howells, too, looked at Lily, and a faint unhappiness came into his eyes. The girl had played her oldest finesse at dinner. She had paired off Bill with Eleanor James, and had kept Bayard Joyce for herself.

It always happened this way, when the visiting man was desirable. Had the Imperial Motors magnate proved to be what Lily termed "stuffy," she would have resigned herself to an evening of dreaming against the safe background of Bill's devotion, and let Eleanor James amuse the visitor. But no amount of repetition would ever take the edge from Bill's suffering when Lily put herself out, as to-night, to charm a new man.

Eleanor James noted his uneasiness. She laughed, and her laugh was singularly low and disarming.

"Bill Howells!" She had the delightfully intimate manner of an old friend who has not only been away some years, but who has been picking up daring in Paris. "You're still Lilian Wentworth's slave."

"Yes, I suppose I am," Bill admitted seriously.

Then he looked into her eyes, and saw there such a clean, sudden delight at the queeriness of a world in which William Howells could go on forever being Lily Wentworth's slave, that he smiled. It was a slow-coming smile, but there was honest amusement in it.

For a moment he was not Bill Howells, but a spectator at a play. He was laughing at his own rôle, and some portion of a weight lifted from his heart.

Eleanor James's cure of him had begun. There were entire minutes, that night, during which Bill was unconscious of Lily, and of the interest in her as a pictorial type that grew apace in Bayard Joyce's eyes.

"Perhaps I'll stay in Westover longer than I had expected," Joyce said, meaningly, to Lily when good nights were being said. There was seldom any occasion for Bayard Joyce to be indirect with women. He knew what he wanted, as a rule, at first sight. If he had had a moment of thinking that there clung a little of small town atmosphere about Lily's mentality, he had a quickly following moment of realization of how quickly he could dissipate that.

"I think you'll like us—in summer," Lily answered with just the right mingling of warmth and uneagerness.

"You must come to see me some time, Bill," was Eleanor James's good night. "I'm a little—lonely, in Westover."

Quick sympathy woke in Bill's eyes.

"I certainly shall, Eleanor," he said. "It's just great, having you back." He missed Joyce's gallant bending over Lily's hand.

The play was on, then. Bayard Joyce and Lilian; and Eleanor James's antiseptic humor closing about Bill Howells; Eleanor James crowding out the faint unhappiness in Bill Howells's eyes.

There hadn't been a time when Lily had dismissed Bill as summarily as she did this time. Usually she called him back just often enough to assure herself that he hadn't gone for good. This spring she for-

got him. Bayard Joyce was, as Bill himself had said, big fish.

Joyce took rooms at the Wells-Lanier, and was seen constantly with Lily throughout April. Bill went twice that month to dinner at Eleanor's home, and drove with her three evenings through the soft spring dusk.

In May something proprietary declared itself in Joyce's attitude toward Lilian, and Lily herself was still correctly warm and cleverly uneager. Seven new pictures were hung in the gallery that month, and Bill saw Eleanor about twelve times. Eleanor had no gallery. She had a beautiful smile, however.

VII

IN JUNE— IN JUNE—

Lily chose the lake as the setting for her acceptance of Bayard Joyce. They had had dinner at home, and "Drive to Cove's Point," she had directed him idly, settling back into the cushioned interior of his car.

The drive proceeded in silence, but Lily was conscious of Joyce's satisfied eyes upon her from time to time. She was in mist gray.

Pale orchid flowers, with a tracery of gold, gently accented her lines. Her mist gray cape had a collar of pearly petals bunched up in delicate profusion about her white throat. Bayard Joyce liked a woman who knew how to dress.

Lily's gold head was bent in serious contemplation of her slipper. He would propose. On the rise of ground on the west side of Brier Lake, beyond Cove's Point, he would speak his love.

On a night like this there might be faint trails of mist hanging about the group of pines. Perhaps a zephyr would come up from the lake. Her cape would trail about her like the mist itself, and a delicate perfume from a California mission garden would rise like a caress from her hair.

Joyce did propose. "Bayard!" Lily answered only, and went into his arms there on the crest above Brier Lake, with the fringe of pines waving pale gray scarfs. A breeze came, and stirred the petals about her throat and struggled to loose the close gold of her hair.

"You're part of the night, Lily," Joyce declared, huskily, pride of possession already in his eyes.

For the first time Lily came out of one of her tableaux unequivocally engaged.

Driving home, she sat in a dreamy absorption. Bayard was talking plans. They would be married within a few weeks. He had a summer place in Connecticut. They would go there after a short trip. The house—the grounds—he was anxious to show her this, to show her that—his possessions—

Lily was only half listening. She was living over again that moment by the lake, and fondling the details of that picture with something of the sadness a miser might feel at bidding farewell to gold with his fingers.

The pines, the mist, the lake; the stirring of the petals at her neck; the breeze whipping her cape out of Bayard Joyce's arms. It was the final picture in the gallery, perhaps.

Marriage—and the gallery of men would be closed. She remembered, closing her eyes. A touch of melancholy was upon her.

"What are you thinking of, dear?" Joyce asked, at length.

"Of something you said to me," Lily responded, truthfully.

"What was it?" He was quickly pleased.

"You said—" Lily's eyes went dreamily past him. "You said back there: 'You are part of the night, Lily.'"

Her words died upon a faint sigh. Bayard Joyce had turned the key upon the gallery of men.

VIII

"You're not surprised, are you?" Eleanor James's hand was softly insistent upon Bill's arm. "No one was surprised in Westover, I suppose. Every one expected it hourly, you might say."

Eleanor was talking confusedly, faster than her wont. "I know I did. Every time I've seen Lily for weeks I've been expecting her to confide the big secret. Every mail I've been looking for one of those big envelopes."

Her laugh was gentle, her eyes were solicitous upon his. "Every time the phone's rung I've picked it up expecting to hear, 'Well, have you heard the news? Lily Wentworth's engaged to Bayard Joyce! The Bayard Joyce, you know. Imperial Motors.'"

Eleanor laughed again, but it died away. Her fund of artificial chatter was gone now. She could only stand and watch the

first shock die out of Bill's eyes. He walked away from her and stood looking out over old Dr. James's old-fashioned garden.

"Bill!" Eleanor came and stood near him. "Bill, you mind, don't you?"

He turned then, and his eyes were calm. "I know what you're thinking, Eleanor." He took her hands and smiled into her eyes. "I know what all Westover will think, in fact. But it just—" He straightened, and his voice rang clear. "It just isn't so, Eleanor. It has happened, and it just doesn't figure. Of course, I want Lily to be happy, and all that, but look here—look at me."

Eleanor raised her eyes to meet his serious gaze. At something in it, her lashes went down again quickly.

"You can see it's all right with me, can't you?" he went on, earnestly. "You believe it, don't you, Eleanor?"

"Yes. I believe it, Bill. I—I was afraid for you."

She let him see her beautiful smile for just a moment.

They said good night then.

There wasn't much more they could say, just then. But Westover said it for them.

"There!" Westover sat back and sighed. Its high faith in the Wentworth tradition was justified. Lilian Wentworth was marrying into Imperial Motors; her picture appeared, not only in the *Westover Press and Post*, but on the society pages of papers in five near-by cities, and in one nationally known Sunday rotogravure.

The first Mrs. Joyce was given due mention in the captions. "Joyce was divorced from his first wife, who was Miss Adelaide Summers, of Baltimore, December 1, 1923," the caption writers remembered.

"Everything's going to be all right," the town gossiped. Lilian was to be congratulated and forgiven her sins, for had she not brought Westover into juxtaposition with Imperial Motors in the public prints? Bayard Joyce, certainly, was to be congratulated. Where could he have found as orchidlike a wife as Lily would make?

Eleanor James, too—here voices were lowered—was to be congratulated. The town hesitated a little here, for Westover was never indelicate. The artist husband had been dead little more than a year, and Bill would want to wait a decent interval after Lily's marriage, of course.

Bill's club was less reticent. It had been quietly jubilant at the announcement

of Lily Wentworth's engagement, and had got things doped out just about right two weeks before the date set for the wedding.

"I guess it's a go, all right," Cyrus Behm puffed a little after his shower. "Bill drove Eleanor off last night and the night before, and the night before that he was there to dinner. Say, old Doc James ought to be alive to see Eleanor come home and marry a town boy."

"Tickles me to death," old E. A. Homer put in. "That boy grew up with my boy. He's the best there is. He just got into the habit of being kind to Lily Wentworth, doing things for her. Habit, that's all. Say, the things habit 'll do—"

"Lily Wentworth!" Outspoken Thad Herbert had the floor, and the members glanced about cautiously before giving him ear. "Lily Wentworth—well—" He calmed down. "Well, it 'll take a Bayard Joyce to team with her."

"The funny part of it is," said Martin Miller, who was continually seeing the funny part of something, "they're as friendly as a couple of lodge members—Lily and Bill are. No strained relations there. I passed Bill's office to-day and looked in. There was Lily, large as life, in Bill's desk chair, perfectly at home, and Bill was standing by the window, looking out. A couple of old school friends, all right. Bill looked right at me and never saw me."

"Hush up, here's Kennedy," somebody warned.

"What of it?" Martin inquired, genially. "H'lo, Rolf," he greeted Bill's young partner with a hearty thump on the back. "You tell us, Rolf," he went on. "You're at headquarters. How are things with Bill and Eleanor?"

Young Kennedy busied himself at his locker. "I don't know," he said. "Have you seen the *Press*?" he asked, after he had fumbled about for a bit.

"Not a sign of the rag," Martin said, cheerfully.

"The *Press*—" Kennedy began, and stopped. "The *Press*—" He fumbled some more.

"Lily Wentworth's broken her engagement to Bayard Joyce," he announced then, abruptly.

IX

MARTIN MILLER had been right.

Lily sat in Bill's desk chair that after-

noon. Bill stood at the window and looked out, seeing nothing. Lily's face was white, her cheeks guiltless of rouge, her costume, under a long coat, a somewhat scrambled effect.

"You see, Bill, it's all here in the letters." She daubed at wet, stricken eyes with a totally inadequate bit of lace. "Look, Bill—"

She held them out to him with a hand that shook. "Her lawyer's letter to him, and—and his letter to me. Look, Bill!" Lily's voice was stricken, too.

"I have read them, dear," Bill said quietly. He continued staring out at Winslow Street through the plate glass of his father's old office window.

"She isn't telling the truth, is she, Bill?" The imperious tone in Lily's voice was broken. She stared at him with bewildered eyes.

"I'm afraid she is," Bill said, miserably. He turned and faced her, compassion in his eyes. "Her lawyer is a famous one, and Joyce's letter is sincere. No doubt he feels it as deeply as you do, Lily. You see, they both thought the divorce was legal. There's no doubt about that. Then, when she read that he expected to marry again, it was too much for her. She went to this Bryce and had him investigate. They ferreted out this technicality, and—and Joyce is not free. She says she will not free him, Lily. Evidently he believes her."

"You—you said all that before, Bill." The words scarcely stirred Lily's lips. She stared at him mutely.

"What can I say, Lily," he asked, crossing to her and taking her hand, "excepting that I'm sorry, dear? I'm more sorry than I can tell you."

"But don't you see, Bill, what I've got to do?" She clung to his hand, and her sudden tears started. "This can't happen to me, Bill! No one must know that he jilted me! No one in Westover— Bill, you aren't saying anything!"

Her voice arose in hysteria. "I—I've got to marry some one—some one else! Right away! Don't you see? You do see," she implored. "You—you've always said you cared for me—always, Bill—"

He freed his hand slowly and went to the window to stare.

"Lily! Lily!" His voice was very quiet.

"It can't! It can't happen to me, Bill. You—you can't let it happen. Westover

can't know. They've got to think I—I changed my mind. Bill, you said you cared. You've always said—"

She began to cry miserably and in earnest. Proud Lily Wentworth was crumpled in Bill Howells's old desk chair. Her miraculous eyes were red with tears. Her gold hair was loosed. Faint lines showed about her beautiful mouth.

"Lily— What is it you want me to do, Lily?"

"You said you cared for me," she whimpered. "For ages and ages you've said it."

"I know, Lily," he agreed patiently. "I'll do anything I can to help you, dear." His lips twisted suddenly. He came toward her. "Anything I can, Lily," he repeated. "You're not to cry."

"You do"—he had to bend close to catch her words—"you do want to—marry me, don't you, Bill?"

"Oh—Lily!"

"We—we can announce it in the *Press*, Bill? To-day?" she pleaded.

"Lily, Lily!" He brushed the loose hair back from her temple, standing there behind her, his eyes fixed miserably on Winslow Street. There was a long silence.

X

SHE began stroking his hand softly, and a light had come into her eyes. Details of a picture were forming and grouping themselves in her mind. There was a new mauve dinner frock—chiffon, with beads sparkling underneath, like dew when the sun is on it.

She would be seen in it in the gold room of the Wells-Lanier, with Bill that night, wearing his flowers. Folks would remark them, his blond head close to her gold one. They would have seen the announcement in the *Press*, and would guess the rest. "They're a picture together," they would probably whisper.

"We'll go out for dinner to-night," she planned aloud. "To the Wells-Lanier, Bill." Her laugh tinkled. "Look at me, Bill. Oh, do smile!" The old imperious

note came back into her voice. "Do smile, Bill!"

She got up slowly, her hands creeping up his arm. "Why, Bill—" The light went out of her eyes. "You look— You look— Say something, Bill!" She clutched his arm tightly. "You haven't said a thing but 'Lily' and 'Oh, Lily!' Bill, why are you looking at me that way?"

"Oh, Lily—"

"Bill!" Panic was in her voice now. "There's something, isn't there? There's something— Why do you go on saying, 'Oh, Lily!' Bill Howells—"

He looked at her, his lips powerless to move.

"Why—" Lily stared at him a long moment, her blue eyes wide and oddly fixed. "Why, it's Eleanor, isn't it?" she breathed. "It's—it's Eleanor! Why—"

"I know, Lily. We're engaged, Eleanor and I. Here, Lily, sit down here. Here—" He guided her.

"Eleanor James! It—it can't be, Bill. You—love me. You've always said—"

"Lily, I love Eleanor, now." There was a wretched kindness in Bill's voice. "You're not to cry. There'll be some one else, Lily—for you."

There followed a long silence in the musty office of Bill's father on Winslow Street.

"Lily, there'll be some one else for you," Bill repeated helplessly.

"Some one else, Bill?" she said vaguely. She began picking up the loose strands of her hair. The five o'clock sun, glancing from a near-by roof, shone in reflected light on the big window. Lily looked up, her eyes weighted with a dark freight of woe.

"Oh, dear!" The window made a perfect mirror, and she stared at their images in it. "Oh, dear, I look a perfect fright, don't I? How did I come to look like this, Bill? And you in that ratty business suit. We look simply terrible. Do look, Bill!"

But the sun was quick. It glanced away again. That picture had no place in Lilian Wentworth's gallery.

BUT IN MY DREAMS—

By day I never think of you at all,

So near are those who love me and are kind;

But in my dreams, where thought heeds no recall,

Remember only you who were unkind.

* Lena Whittaker Blakeney

Diversion in the Seventh Oasis

THE UNVARNISHED RECITAL OF A MILLION-DOLLAR WAGER IN
THE WELL-KNOWN DESERT METROPOLIS OF RED BLUFF

By Earl Wayland Bowman

Here's the tale of a serpent—
In fact, a couple of snakes;
Which makes it quite clear
Why people should fear
The booze a bootlegger makes.
Songs of the Entire Audience

IN the large window of Saloon Number Four, "Cyrus" coiled and uncoiled, languidly. Sensitive souls may intimate that a five-foot bull snake, in such environment, is inopportune. But sensitive souls were not a part of Red Bluff's human ensemble, and this was before the Eighteenth Amendment.

In the 207-person, one Chinese laundry, one borax mine, one livery stable, seven saloon metropolis of Red Bluff, nestling in the midst of the perpetual desert which surrounds the southwestern penultimate of the sovereign State of Nevada, a bull snake named Cyrus, coiling and uncoiling in the window of Saloon Number Four, was accepted, enthusiastically, as a conservative elucidation of civic psychology.

Red Bluff considered Cyrus appropriate, and what the rest of the world thought of it, Red Bluff did not care.

Red Bluff also exulted, independently, regarding "Blazer," Chuck Roden's corkscrew-tailed bulldog pup; "Angel," Wong Gee's former fighting rooster; "Edith," Dirty Shirt Smith's racing horned toad; "Perfect Alibi," Heterogeneous Saunders's polecat—and family—whose home was in the hole under the northeast corner of the livery stable; "Hector," Solemn Johnson's indisputable red ant; *et cetera*.

For two months Cyrus coiled and uncoiled. Then, on a certain sultry mid afternoon in late July, Solemn Johnson and Dirty Shirt Smith, unaware of the captive

bull snake, returned from Dead Angel Mountain, on the edge of Hellfire Basin, which is perhaps the most desolate, arid, and undesirable portion of the total desert.

Solemn and Dirty Shirt, venerable prospectors, partners for forty years, discoverers and owners of the borax mine across the gulch, unloaded the pack from their patient, mouse-colored burro named Versus; piled their stuff inside their humble, yet cozy cabin, detoured, and by mutual consent directed their steps toward the front entrance to the very saloon in the window of which Cyrus writhed.

"Well, of all things!" Dirty Shirt exclaimed, suddenly. "If yonder ain't a snake!"

"Where's a snake?" Solemn cried, stopping abruptly.

"In that window!"

"Which window?"

"That window right yonder. Can't you see nothin'? It's a bull snake!"

Solemn's keen gray eyes located the captive reptile.

"Damned if it ain't so!" he muttered, disgustedly.

Solemn and Dirty Shirt slowly approached the window.

"I've a notion," Solemn grunted, utter contempt in his voice, "to go on down to Saloon Number Five, or back to Saloon Number Three. A man ought to boycott a saloon that fills its window with snake, an' 'specially bull snake!"

Dirty Shirt chuckled. Solemn's words reminded him of the cause of his partner's personal antipathy to this particular species of serpent.

While they camped one night, some years before, in Sodamint Cañon, a vagrant bull

snake sought shelter in Solemn's bed. Awakened by the reptile's stealthy, undulating movements against his body, Solemn, in the pale moonlight, mistook the bull snake's mottled folds for those of a deadly, venomous, diamond-backed rattler.

Since that horrifying moment and its resultant excitement, Solemn had hated bull snakes persistently, consistently, and without reserve. Now, as he gazed at Cyrus, he flushed a dull and angry red.

"'Tis sort of prophetic, ain't it?" Dirty Shirt laughed.

Solemn's answer was a sudden push inward of the swinging door, proving again that immediate desire masters aversion.

"Where'd that thing come from?" Solemn asked, nodding toward the window.

Chuck Roden, the bartender, slid a bottle along the bar, glanced up, and answered Solemn's question.

"Mexican Pete caught him out at Arsenic Springs. He was full of prairie dog, an' sluggish."

"An' you bought him?"

"Yep—for a quart of tequila." Chuck laughed. "His name's Cyrus. Nice exhibit, ain't he? An' quite a diversion!"

Solemn snorted, and poured out a drink.

Chuck glanced toward Colonel Spilkins, Red Bluff's polished postmaster, scholarly justice of the peace, *et cetera*, who leaned in a pensive mood against the farther end of the bar. The bartender winked.

Colonel Spilkins returned the wink, and murmured:

"Diversion? Ah, diversion is the idealistic thing!"

Solemn and Dirty Shirt looked curiously at the colonel.

Cyrus writhed uneasily within his prison, affecting the slow, indolent grace that bull snakes love to achieve.

"He's well muscled, ain't he?" Dirty Shirt observed, admiringly. "But he looks melancholy. Maybe he ought to have a wife, or somethin', to keep him entertained. He acts lonesome."

"Diversion? Oh, diversion!" Colonel Spilkins muttered again, shaking his head as if depressed.

Once more Solemn and Dirty Shirt stared at the colonel.

"That snake acts lonesome," Dirty Shirt repeated.

"There you go again!" Solemn snorted. "Always thinkin' of somethin' bein' lonesome or needin' a wife."

"Old as you are," Solemn finished, glaring contemptuously at Dirty Shirt, "you still remain a sentimental imbecile, wantin' to entertain a polluted old bull snake."

"Snakes needs wives, I tell you," Dirty Shirt insisted.

"'Snakes needs wives!'" Solemn mocked derisively. "Who ever heard of a darn fool snake havin' a wife?"

II

THERE was an ominous pause. A little whirlwind flirled suddenly along the wide, single-sided business street of Red Bluff, flinging against the window in which Cyrus squirmed, a splatter of dust and gravel as hot, almost, as ashes fresh from a furnace.

"Snakes has wives," Dirty Shirt reiterated, stubbornly. "Yes, even a rattlesnake has a wife. An' he don't chase around with other rattlesnakes' wives, which is sayin' more for a rattlesnake than can be said for a lot of human men that think they're better, an' smarter, an' moraler than rattlesnakes is—but ain't!"

"What's that got to do with diversion?"

Solemn Johnson snapped out the question with sudden viciousness.

It was an underhand shot, and Dirty Shirt Smith flinched.

"Well, of all things!" he began, unsteadily. "Diversion is—diversion. Now, for instance, diversion—" Dirty Shirt floundered hopelessly.

"Oh, an eternal quest to escape the dreary, deadly consciousness of self," Colonel Spilkins remarked, softly, a dreamy, far-away look in his handsome eyes, while his hands toyed with the glass before him. "What idiotic offerings, from poodle dog parties and peacock parades to horntoad races and banquets to burros, do we lay upon the altars of passion and its alibis, with the age-old bunk, to wit: 'We are bored to death, and we have got to have, and we are going to have—*diversion!*'"

Solemn listened glumly, sullenly, to Colonel Spilkins's eloquence.

Dirty Shirt nodded his head in triumphant indorsement.

Chuck grinned and chuckled: "I knew he was goin' to."

"Goin' to what?" Dirty Shirt innocently inquired.

"Have one of them eruptions of vocabulary," Chuck answered, laughing. "He has 'em twice a year. One was about due, an' 'diversion' started it."

Cyrus stretched, yawned, and uncoiled. Solemn deliberately turned his back, picked up the bottle, moodily poured out a drink, and drank it.

Three scorching, withering days went by. And Solemn Johnson and Dirty Shirt Smith sat on the doorsill of the bath shack, out at Piute Hot Springs, in Rattlesnake Cañon, one and a half miles southwest of Red Bluff. After their plunge in Red Bluff's one and only bathing resort, Solemn and Dirty Shirt sat dreamily watching the heat waves dancing above the desert.

Dirty Shirt sighed, and glanced toward the northeast corner of the shack.

"Well, of all things!" he half whispered. "If yonder ain't another snake!"

Solemn looked quickly around.

"Are you sure?"

"Sure as shootin'," Dirty Shirt nodded. "If that ain't a snake, then Cyrus ain't a snake, or I miss my guess."

"Cyrus is a snake," Solemn admitted.

"Cyrus is a bull snake, an' that—" Dirty Shirt began.

"Is a gopher snake," Solemn interrupted, fixing his gaze on the reptile.

"I reckon you're schemin' to capture him an' take him to Red Bluff to be Cyrus's wife or somethin'!" he concluded, sneeringly.

Dirty Shirt flushed, and took a chew of tobacco.

"Gopher snakes an' bull snakes don't harmonize!" he murmured, absently.

Solemn grinned cunningly, and took a chew himself.

The snake, five feet in length to the fraction of an inch, crawled from under the shack, hesitated a moment, then slowly wriggled to the shade of the scrawny piñon tree, and rested. It was, indeed, a gopher snake—a most beautiful specimen.

Instantly, when Solemn recognized the family to which the serpent belonged, a scheme began to frame itself in his mind. This it was that had caused him to grin.

Now, while the gopher snake lay panting beneath the scant shade of the piñon tree, Solemn bit his underlip thoughtfully, while the idea that had come to him gradually assumed a definite form. Dirty Shirt sat, with eyes half closed, carelessly watching the snake.

"Did you have any intentions?" Solemn asked, suddenly.

"None at all," Dirty Shirt answered, "not even in th' first place!"

"Then I'll have some."

"Go ahead an' have 'em. Nobody gives a damn!"

"Then I'll catch 'Diversion,' myself, an' I'll—"

"Catch who th' hell, yourself?" Dirty Shirt broke in, looking earnestly and a little uneasily at Solemn.

"Diversion, my snake!" Solemn replied, quietly. "That's him layin' out there in th' shade of that piñon tree, an' his name's Diversion."

Dirty Shirt broke into derisive laughter.

"What are you laughin' at?" Solemn snapped.

Dirty Shirt continued his insulting chuckling.

"What are you laughin' at, I said?" Solemn repeated, threateningly. "I'll knock your danged old head off in a minute if you don't tell me what you're laughin' at, I told you!"

III

THE gopher snake found a crevice at the foot of the tree, crawled half his length into the hole, and stopped. Dirty Shirt leaned forward and laughed loudly, uproariously, and still refused to answer Solemn's question.

Solemn stooped down and picked up a dry stick a couple of feet in length that was lying beside the door of the shack. For a moment he glared at Dirty Shirt, and gritted his teeth, then he slowly, cautiously, arose, and tiptoed over to the tree.

He took a double half hitch of the snake's tail around the stick, thus forestalling the reptile's intention of crawling entirely into the hole. Returning to the shack, Solemn sat down again beside Dirty Shirt.

"Oh, gosh!" Dirty Shirt choked. "If that don't beat all! Who ever heard of th' like?"

"Don't beat all what?" Solemn retorted, viciously. "You'd better tell me what's so damned ticklish, or somethin's goin' to take place dog-gone quick!"

Something in Solemn's tone was a warning to Dirty Shirt.

"Why—why— Oh, my Gawd!" Dirty Shirt strangled. "Th'—th' idea of namin' a—a—gopher snake—Diversion!"

Solemn looked contemptuously at Dirty Shirt.

"Did you ever know a gopher snake named anything else?" he asked, coolly.

Dirty Shirt instantly stopped laughing.

Solemn's question had come like a clap of thunder out of a cloudless sky. Dirty Shirt had never looked at it in that way. He started to speak, stammered, tried to go on again, swallowed uncomfortably, and, utterly confused, remained silent.

Dirty Shirt had seen thousands of gopher snakes—if possible, more gopher snakes than any other variety, unless, perhaps, it might be "side winders." And yet, although his brain was tortured with the effort to remember, he couldn't, on the spur of the moment, recall the name of a single gopher snake he had ever met. So far as Dirty Shirt knew, stunned as he was by Solemn's sudden interruption of his mirth, every gopher snake in the entire universe might have been named Diversion. Dirty Shirt realized that it was absurd, but that's the way he felt about it.

Solemn stared steadily at him, and enjoyed his triumph. Dirty Shirt flushed, and once more thoughtlessly swallowed.

Almost instantly the flush left his lean, weather-tanned face. A startled, surprised look, such as one sees sometimes in the eyes of a man who is mortally shot, came into Dirty Shirt's eyes. He put his hand quickly, pathetically, up to his mouth:

"I—I—" he stammered, looking reproachfully at Solemn. "I—I—swal—swaller—swaller-ed my tobacco!"

Solemn laughed cruelly.

"You ought to 'a' swallowed it," he announced, unfeelingly. "Anybody that don't recognize that Diversion is th' logical name for a gopher snake, ought to swaller their tobacco."

"I—swa-allered it!" Dirty Shirt repeated, numbly.

"Practically every gopher snake that is, is named Diversion," Solemn went on, relentlessly, "an' it's time a man your age was learnin' it. In addition to which, if you'll watch what happens in th' course of th' next few events, an' not be so danged criticizin', you'll find out that there ain't no designation in th' total dictionary as appropriate for that 'special gopher snake, layin' part way in an' part way out of that hole out yonder, as Diversion is."

Dirty Shirt choked, but Solemn went on, unfeelingly:

"Where's that gunny sack we brung along for a bath towel? Diversion can ride back to Red Bluff in it, an' then I'll deposit him in th' Seventh Oasis!"

Two minutes later Diversion was in the sack, and the sack was on Solemn's shoulder. Soon thereafter two old prospectors were trudging silently over the slithering, sun-scorched sand toward the rapid metropolis of Red Bluff.

"His name's Diversion!" Solemn proudly announced to Ed Slocum, the bartender in Saloon Number Seven, affectionately termed the Seventh Oasis. He spilled the gopher snake out in front of the bar, and produced a miniature panic among the customers present.

"His name's what?"

"Diversion!" Solemn repeated, with a withering glance at Dirty Shirt. "There ain't no other name that classifies a gopher snake like Diversion does."

"I'll leave it to Colonel Spilkins if that ain't reliable information about gopher snakes!" Solemn concluded, as the colonel strolled in and up to the bar.

Colonel Spilkins nodded his head and looked admiringly at Diversion.

"Absolutely consistent," he murmured, and turned toward the bartender. "Yes, as usual, Ed!"

Solemn smiled happily.

"Put Diversion in th' window, Ed," he laughed. "I'll contribute him, an' we'll run him in competition to that Cyrus they got down at Saloon Number Four."

Ed complied, the audience following to the window to watch Diversion bump his nose against the glass. The gopher snake did not disappoint.

He bumped it hard once, seemed surprised; studied a moment, hit it again, but a bit more cautiously; pondered awhile, then, with great care, reached out and touched the glass. By now, having decided there really must be something there, and that it was a matter of no great consequence anyhow, he coiled up and yawned.

"I'll bet he's a fighter," a spectator observed. "Look at the size of that mouth!"

Diversion yawned again.

"His mouth is a whopper, ain't it?" Ed laughed.

"Diversion's a whopper all over," Solemn exulted; "from th' top of his head to th' soles of his feet!"

Dirty Shirt, his poise somewhat recovered after his recent humiliation out at Piute Hot Springs, felt that the time was opportune for reprisals.

"Oh, he ain't so danged much," he remarked, carelessly.

"He's a danged hell of a lot!" Solemn snapped.

"Dependin' on th' viewpoint," Dirty Shirt went on coolly, squinting his eyes as if deliberately searching for flaws in Diversion's construction. "Some people, not educated on snakes, for instance, might think he's a right smart of a snake; but, naturally, bein' just a gopher snake, he ain't nigh as favorable a all around snake on general principles as Cyrus be!"

IV

DIRTY SHIRT'S words were hot cinders in a gasoline tank. Solemn exploded.

For forty years Solemn Johnson and Dirty Shirt Smith had been partners; for forty years they had been inseparable; for forty years these two now venerable prospectors had—

Shared the thirst of the desert cursed,

And shared the Yukon's cold;
They had shared the pains and the meager gains
Of the mad hunt after gold.

And on their weary, soul-wrenching trails over the trackless wastes, in the silent nights mid the infinite solitudes, under the white stars, they had come to a subconscious realization that argument is the only effective antidote that makes endurable such an association. And moreover such contention reveals, by its very pretense of animosity, a depth of mutual affection so profound that words of affirmation are wholly futile to express it.

Diversion and Cyrus, gopher snake and bull snake respectively, while relatively insignificant as entities, did, however, possess high intrinsic worth. They offered unexpected, not to say unusual, opportunity for the now rich—since the discovery of the borax mine—prospectors and partners to engage in the exquisite joy of mutual opposition.

Colonel Spilkins, alone, perhaps, of the entire audience, could grasp the hair line psychology of it all. The others present, however, enjoyed the situation with equal fervor.

For a moment Solemn could not speak. Dirty Shirt stood and smiled, insultingly.

"Why, you danged old, red-whiskered, squinty-eyed, mole-on-your-eared, centipede dodger!" Solemn exclaimed, passionately. "Diversion's a better snake than Cyrus ever dared to be! Look at what a chest he's got on him! Look at his—his—his whole damned torso! Look at his

mouth! I bet he could swaller a rabbit easier than Cyrus could swaller a—a—horntoad."

"Cyrus has got a bigger mouth than Diversion has," Dirty Shirt declared, with deadly calmness. "Cyrus is trimmer built; Cyrus wriggles faster, an' if they was matched in a race, danged if I ain't got a idea Cyrus would outrun him."

"My dog's a better dog than your dog are!" Colonel Spilkins quoted, softly, with a chuckle.

"A bull snake's a quicker snake than a gopher snake is," Dirty Shirt went on, like an echo to the colonel's remark.

"He is, is he?" Solemn snorted. "Well, I'll just bet my half of a certain borax mine across th' gulch, that Diversion can outrun, outwriggle, outfight, outswaller, out-anything any damn bull snake that can be produced—much less that miserable scrub called Cyrus, down at Saloon Number Four, any day in th' week!"

"Ain't we extemporaneous?"

"I said I'd bet it, an' I'll bet it."

"Well, I'll just bet my half, which is th' other half of th' same identical borax mine," Dirty Shirt announced with sudden grimness, "that a unnamed old yaller-whiskered red ant adopter will lose his half if he bets his half that that insignificant gopher snake named Diversion can out-anything any bull snake, let alone as high class a bull snake as Cyrus are."

The crowd gasped. A million-dollar borax mine gambled on the relative merits of a pair of Nevada reptiles!

With one accord, the entire assembly moved toward the bar.

"What 'll it be?" Solemn demanded. "A swallerin' match?"

"Swallerin' suits me!" Dirty Shirt retorted promptly.

Solemn studied a moment.

"To-day's Monday, ain't it?" he asked.

"She's Monday, all right!" Dirty Shirt agreed.

"Come Saturday, then," Solemn continued. "At 9.30 P.M. in th' evening, Diversion, th' unanswerable gopher snake, defendin' th' honor of Solemn Johnson an' Saloon Number Seven, will be present right here in said saloon, otherwise th' Seventh Oasis. He will outswaller th' said Cyrus, Saloon Number Four's contemptible an' disgustin' bull snake, on anything from a grasshopper to full-grown prairie dogs, or, for that matter, hydrophobia cats. Th'

winner takes th' whole damn borax mine, in addition to which he buys th' drinks!"

"Totally congenial to me!" Dirty Shirt answered, carelessly. "Colonel Spilkins to referee it, I reckon. This is th' Scotch, Ed; I wanted th' Bourbon."

V

THERE followed days of emotional anticipation for Red Bluff. With the single exception of Mother Skillern, the only feminine fraction of the metropolis, and the proprietor of Red Bluff's two-story frame hotel, the entire two hundred or so of the metropolitan population made mental reservation for ring side seats for the coming demonstration.

Tuesday, in Saloon Number Four, details were completed.

"Who provides th' material?" Solemn asked.

"Provides what material?" Dirty Shirt countered.

"Th' material for Diversion an' Cyrus to work on in this approachin' swallerin' exhibition," Solemn explained, testily.

"Wong Gee's got some fryin' chickens," Dirty Shirt suggested.

Dirty Shirt was cunning. He knew that bull snakes have an especial fondness for feathered things.

Solemn detected the plot.

"By Saturday," he replied, pretending innocence, "Diversion 'll be in condition to just as soon swaller a chicken as anything else; but, just for th' sake of argument, I vote for rabbits—or prairie dogs, to say th' least."

Colonel Spilkins and Heterogeneous Saunders had, a moment before, strolled into the saloon and stood, listening. A twinkle trembled in the colonel's eyes, a slow grin parted his lips.

"How big are Perfect Alibi's kittens, Heterogeneous?" he asked, in a whispered aside.

"'Bout half grown," Saunders replied.

"Probably big as medium rabbits. Why?"

"Can you spare a couple?"

"Hell, yes!" Heterogeneous answered.

"I can spare all of them. If they start progressin' like Perfect Alibi when they get to be adults, it won't be long till there won't be nothin' but polecats boardin' down at th' livery barn."

Colonel Spilkins chuckled, and turned toward the present joint owners of the borax mine.

"You can work Diversion on a prairie dog if you want to," Dirty Shirt snapped at Solemn, "but, for my part, I think I'll use chicken for Cyrus to swaller."

"They ought to operate on th' same material, or else—" Solemn insisted.

"You are right, Solemn," Colonel Spilkins interrupted. "If this swallowing contest between Diversion and Cyrus, gopher snake and bull snake, respectively, is to be innocent of all handicap, each belligerent should negotiate, or attempt to encompass, an identical equivalent."

"In which event?" Solemn queried, somewhat uncertainly.

"Yes, Colonel Spilkins," Dirty Shirt also asked, "you bein' th' referee, in which event what?"

"In which event," the colonel said, laughingly, "Heterogeneous Saunders generously provides the solution."

"Polecats?" Solemn and Dirty Shirt inquired in unison.

"Polekittens," Colonel Spilkins corrected, gently.

The million-dollar bettors looked at each other dubiously.

"It—it—seems kind of unnatural," Solemn stammered.

"In addition to which, who'll catch 'em?" Dirty Shirt demanded.

"Also, who'll hold 'em while Diversion an' Cyrus start to swallerin'?" Solemn added, uneasily.

"I'll bring 'em to th' Seventh Oasis," Heterogeneous volunteered; "after which, th' remainder is your problem."

"Individually, I don't consider it feasible," Dirty Shirt declared, glaring at Solemn; "but, if the party of th' other part ain't too big a coward, I'm willin' to try th' experiment. Anyhow, by Saturday night I figure Cyrus will be capable of swallerin' mighty nigh anything he can get his hands on."

"Provide th' polekittens!" Solemn snapped. "Swaller by swaller, Diversion will humiliate that disgustable Cyrus beyond redemption."

Dirty Shirt's only reply was a sarcastic sneer.

VI

It was a gorgeous night, mysterious, silent, shadowy. From the summit of Dead Angel Mountain to Arsenic Springs, from Arsenic Springs to Sodamint Cañon, the voluptuous moon flooded the sleeping earth

with her silvery sheen of loveliness. A billion stars twinkled and danced, like rubies and diamonds and sapphires, in the infinite depths of the velvety dome of the heavens.

Only the desert could look as the desert looked that night; only the desert could whisper, as the desert whispered then of love, romance, adventure, and—ah, who knows?—perchance even of tragedy. Perhaps there impended one of those grim, cruel tragedies which forever, through all the throbbing eternities, over the cold, white sands of time, have stalked the faltering, stumbling steps of human souls as they sought—ah, what did they seek?

In the Seventh Oasis there was tenseness. Every breath was bated.

"Here's Cyrus!" Dirty Shirt Smith exclaimed, entering promptly at 9.29 P.M., a gunny sack sagging over his shoulder. "Has Heterogeneous brung them polekittens yet?"

"He has gone for them," Colonel Spilkins replied.

Chuck Roden's corkscrew-tailed bulldog pup, Blazer, sniffed suspiciously at the sack as Dirty Shirt carefully eased his burden down.

"Get out, you little devil," Dirty Shirt grunted, kicking the pup away. "You'll get Cyrus excited."

Blazer backed off, growling, and sat down against the bar.

Within the sack, Cyrus squirmed and writhed uneasily.

"He's trained to a gnat's eyewinker," Dirty Shirt boasted, squatting over the sack. "I bet you Cyrus could swaller a porcupine."

"He'll think he's swallered worse than a porcupine before Diversion gets through with him," Solemn retorted.

"Take Cyrus out of th' sack," some one suggested.

"Yeah, an' get Diversion. Let's see how they match up."

"I don't need to take Cyrus out." Dirty Shirt laughed. "Give him half a chance, an' he'll come out himself."

Solemn went to the window, and returned, dragging Diversion, five feet of empty, muscular, peevish gopher snake, to the center of the room.

At that juncture, Heterogeneous Saunders entered, a feed basket over his arm.

"Here's th' polekittens," he announced, calmly.

"Hold them a minute, Heterogeneous," Colonel Spilkins said, raising his hand and laughing a bit tremulously. "Hold them carefully! We do not wish to experience any spontaneous emotional disturbance on their part!"

The crowd grew silent, awed as much by the old colonel as by the young polecats.

"Gentlemen!" Colonel Spilkins resumed, gracefully. "You are about to witness a contest such as few men—and, as far as I know, no ladies whatever—have had the pleasure of enjoying as spectators. It is nothing less than a swallowing match between Diversion, Solemn Johnson's full-blooded gopher snake, length five feet; and Cyrus, same dimensions, Saloon Number Four's bull snake.

"The latter reptile is, in the present instance, Dirty Shirt Smith's entry for the swallowing championship of the universe. It is a wonderful and unique opportunity—for something to happen!"

"The terms of the conflict are, briefly, these: the snake that swallows his polekitten—kindly donated for the occasion by our esteemed fellow townsman, Mr. Heterogeneous Saunders—the quicker will be declared the triumphant victor.

"Solemn and Dirty Shirt have bet the borax mine on the outcome of the exhibition—winner to take all. Kindly step back and—

"My, Gawd, ketch 'em!" Colonel Spilkins gasped, reverting, in the excitement, to his boyhood vocabulary and pronunciation. "Grab 'em! Ketch them danged snakes!"

A five-foot brown streak had slithered from Solemn's hands, and Diversion hit the floor. As Dirty Shirt sprang back, a five-foot mottled length of hungry bull snake slid wickedly out of the sack over which his backer had crouched. For the fraction of a second Cyrus's beady black eyes flashed fury and hate into the beady black eyes of Diversion.

"Ketch 'em!" Colonel Spilkins shouted again. "Don't let 'em loose till the polekittens is ready!"

It was too late.

VII

HISSING all the bull snake profanity he knew, Cyrus lunged at Diversion.

The gopher snake ducked, and grabbed for Cyrus's neck, and missed, but his wide-spread jaws slid along the diamond-marked

body of his enemy, and clamped on the bull snake's tail.

Diversion at once began to swallow.

"These danged polekittens are superfluous now," Heterogeneous mumbled, dully, and set the basket on the bar.

Cyrus heaved desperately, and tugged frantically. He was being swallowed—and he knew he was being swallowed—but there didn't seem to be a thing he could do about it.

Diversion shut his eyes, hung on, and swallowed, and kept on swallowing.

Solemn Johnson was jubilant.

"What do you think of that?" he gloated to Dirty Shirt Smith. "Whose snake's th' prize swallerer now?"

The boast was premature.

Even while the words were on Solemn's lips, Cyrus doubled over, and, with a lightning flash snap of his jaws, seized the triumphantly waving tail of his opponent. Then the bull snake began to do some swallowing on his own account.

"They're swallerin' each other!" a voice cried, chokingly.

It was true. Inch by inch, Diversion was disappearing down the throat of Cyrus. Trifle by trifle, but with immutable certitude, Cyrus was being inhaled by the equally determined Diversion.

Sweat beads broke out on Solemn Johnson's brow. Dirty Shirt Smith plucked tremblingly at the neckband of his shirt, and unconsciously gulped in sympathy, and almost in unison, with Cyrus's desperate efforts.

Colonel Spilkins pressed a shaking hand to his forehead.

"Good Heavens!" he whispered, fighting for self-control. "How is this to end?"

"It ain't goin' to end!" Ed Slocum laughed. "It's a irresistible suction versus a teetotal cinch, reducin' itself to nothin', swaller by swaller."

For five, ten, fifteen, twenty minutes, the unbelievable struggle went on.

Two five-foot lengths of bull snake and gopher snake, individually, became a single five-foot loop of gopher snake and bull snake, mixed, pulling, tugging, gulping, swallowing—swallowing—swallowing itself, its circumference steadily, impossibly, being reduced.

A deathlike stillness reigned in the Seventh Oasis.

"They are more than two-thirds swal-

lowed already!" Colonel Spilkins muttered, dazedly. "Each one must be swallowing himself by now, as well as his opponent!"

"It can't be did!" one of the spectators cried, wildly.

"Shut up!" a chorus of hoarse whispers hissed.

"Just the same, it *is* bein' did!" a voice murmured, rebelliously.

The reptilian circle grew smaller and smaller.

"Oh, Gawd!" Solemn Johnson suddenly groaned.

"Oh, Gawd, also!" Dirty Shirt Smith echoed.

The eyes of Diversion were set and glassy, yet he would not yield. He knew, all too well, that if he missed a single swallow, his case was hopeless.

Cyrus glared across the circle with hatred—all the pent-up, inherited, traditional enmity of his ancestral bull snakes toward gopher snakes in general, and toward this gopher snake in particular—glittering in his beady black orbs. He, too, realized, with equal force, that the situation was serious.

Unless by a supreme—possibly an unexpected—swallow, Cyrus could get at least one gulp ahead of Diversion, there was no possible chance that the bull snake would ever again chase prairie dogs or ground owls out among the scenes of his childhood adjacent to Arsenic Springs.

The audience scarcely breathed.

VIII

THE uncanny silence intrigued the polekittens, nestling in their basket on the edge of the bar. They climbed up and looked over.

Blazer, Chuck Roden's corkscrew-tailed bulldog pup, sitting against the bar, broke their fall to the floor.

One second later a young canine, straggling, gasping, sobbing as only can a bulldog pup that is thirsty for fresh air, emerged from the open back door of the Seventh Oasis.

Two seconds later Perfect Alibi's children, feeling that they had been outraged, and yet in a manner revenged, emerged from the same rear entrance of the same oasis.

Three seconds later the last of the human contents of the Seventh Oasis had successfully negotiated the swinging front doors of the same establishment.

Diversion, gopher snake, and Cyrus, bull snake, virtually entirely swallowed by themselves and each other, were the only remaining occupants of the scene of slaughter and panic.

An hour later, Colonel Spilkins, as referee, made a heroic dash in and out of the Seventh Oasis.

The audience waited, outside, to hear the verdict.

The colonel came out, gasping and pale.

"Who—who—won?" Solemn and Dirty Shirt stuttered.

"No-nobody!" Colonel Spilkins choked. "Diversion and Cyrus are—are—gone! They must have—have totally—swallowed themselves!"

"Then you—you don't know—how it ended?" Solemn inquired.

"I—I—don't know anything," the colonel replied, with his sense of humor unobscured; "except that the Seventh Oasis has the worst case of spontaneous emotional disturbance with which I ever came in contact. We would better all try to—to—adjourn—from ourselves!"

To this day, the case of "Diversion vs. Cyrus in the Seventh Oasis," is recorded as an unsolved mystery of that once rapid metropolis far out in the great penultimate of southwestern Nevada.

Red Bluff has never happened to remember that, in the presence of vast and common polecat calamity, even gopher snakes and bull snakes declare an armistice, forget their trifling disagreements, and, by mutual consent, seek the open air.

THE OLD HOME TOWN

For years a fond desire I'd held
To see my old home town.
From memory the tears had welled
At thoughts of streets, dust brown,
Down which I'd scuffled, bare of feet;
Of lots where I had played;
Of my old school, and of the seat
My jackknife art displayed.

And so, at last, I made my mind
To see all this again.
I did not doubt that I should find
It just the same as then.
My auto fairly hummed along
To hurry me up there.
The engine seemed to sing a song
And I rode on the air.

One final curve; before me lay
The town I'd known of yore.
And always shall I curse that day
And what it held in store.
For gone was every dusty street—
The pavement glistened white;
The vacant lots were all replete
With filling-stations bright.

The school I'd known had disappeared—
A new one in its place;
And our old house where I was reared
Had fallen to disgrace.
I turned my car, stepped on the gas
And quickly went away.
An awful thing had come to pass—
My dreams had gone to stay.

Lester Raymond Cash

Mighty Waters

**MEN BECOME GIANTS WHEN THEY WRESTLE WITH THE FORCES
OF NATURE, BUT THEIR HARDEST BATTLE IS TO
CONQUER THEIR HUMAN WEAKNESSES**

By William Merriam Rouse

LIFE was easier to understand in the days when thirty thousand standard of logs used to come thundering down the river each spring.

In these days men and women are filled by complexes and psychic turmoils, but in that time they knew simple love and hate, faith and fear. There was strength in that life, as in the pounding black logs which filled the Dunder River; and in its lights and shadows there was a beauty akin to the foaming waters.

The spring that old Jonas Reed had the big drive was like other springs, sweet with pale and tender buds, and mighty with the rush of melting snows. Spring itself was the same, but life in Reed's little village of Dunder Falls flowed more swiftly and more turbulently than it had in decades. It was the biggest drive since Jonas built the sawmill, and bought the general store, and became overlord of that township.

The spiked boots of threescore river drivers splintered the wooden sidewalks, and the walls of Frenchy Pattno's boarding house shook to the roar of their voices on the nights when they celebrated.

The village girls thrilled and trembled at sight of checked shirts of red and green and blue, such as no farm hand of those days had moral courage to wear. They looked on, these rosy-cheeked girls, while men rode death in the form of a plunging log, and handled dynamite as carelessly as children did their sticks of sugar candy.

Reed was bringing down from the lumber woods, not only logs for his own mill to saw through the summer, but a great drive which would be taken the length of the Dunder and rafted on Lake Champlain. He liked to speculate, although no risk ever clouded the twinkle in his bright eyes,

or took the crisp aggressiveness from his spade-shaped white beard.

Yet he did not court the chances which he forever seemed to be taking; he guarded against them. And, for this drive, in which a good part of his fortune was at stake, he had hired Wild Bill Renshaw, the best river boss between the St. Lawrence and the headwaters of the Hudson.

What Wild Bill and his gang could not do with logs was not to be done by cant hook and pike pole.

The Dunder River lay covered with timber for miles to the north, and the gang all boarded at Frenchy Pattno's place, while tens of thousands of sticks of spruce, and hemlock, and pine were eased down past Dunder Falls.

By day the men fought the river; drenched in ice water, cursing joyously, bull-throated, and fearless. By night they milled in the village, played poker in Frenchy's basement, and sometimes drank and fought until the hammering fists of Wild Bill, and his steel-spiked boots, crashed into their battle.

It was this Bill Renshaw who stood on the bridge below the falls one evening at dusk, and looked thoughtfully up and down the river—up at the foaming white of the falls, and then down to the rapids where jams formed repeatedly, and gave his huskies more trouble than any other spot along the miles of tumbling river.

The boss stood six feet four in his boots. He could crack an inch board with his fist as easily as an ordinary man could snap a shingle with thumb and finger.

All that the logs meant was on Renshaw's mind; his job, and the river, and the high standing he would have with old Jonas when they were all in the lake, and

safely rafted so that they would not be lost.

But he was thinking of something more than logs as he leaned against one of the bolted timbers of the wooden bridge. He had glanced up the road, and he had seen a long cape fluttering in the evening breeze.

That cape meant Cynthia Reed; for capes had just come into style, and she was the only girl in the village who heard the voice of fashion from the great world before it had died to a whisper.

Cynthia would be coming down across the bridge with some errand; but his heart leaped at the remembrance that, night after night, she had found errands to take her to the few scattering houses on the other side of the river. It was always this hour, when he came up out of the thick air of the "doghouse," as the basement was called, to smoke his after-supper pipe and plan his work for the next day.

Wild Bill had been appalled at first, when Cynthia stopped beside him; but it did not take him long to become acquainted with the daughter of Jonas Reed.

He found that he could talk to her; and many of the half forgotten things he had learned before poverty forced him out of high school, came back to mind. It had been a harder fight to starve and study at the same time than ever it had been to handle a river gang.

Cynthia did not walk like the other girls he had known; and, with the exception of the few who had laughed at his patches in school, he had known but two kinds—the girls a lumberjack would meet on a spree, and the wholesome, sparkling-eyed daughters of village and farm.

Cynthia was different. Even before she had gone away to school, nature had started her after a plan different from that of the others. She made Renshaw think of the wild roses he sometimes found growing bravely in fence corners, delicate and rare, and yet having strength sufficient to thrive in the rugged north.

II

Now Cynthia stopped, coming slowly to a halt, as though she had not known she would find him there, and as though she were of two minds about stopping. Her lips smiled, but in the soft darkness of her eyes there was a hint of trouble.

So Renshaw thought, and he also thought he knew the cause. But his mind was

more upon the fluffy masses of black hair, drawn down low across her white forehead; more concerned with her slim fingers as they held her cape together against the damp air.

"Good evening!" she said, in the small but rich-toned voice at which he never ceased to marvel. That was her only greeting as she came up and stood beside him; another girl would have flashed a witticism, or giggled foolishly. A visit from any other girl, at this hour of quiet thought and planning, would have been a nuisance.

Bill lifted the faded and torn felt hat that rode his brown head at a cocky angle. The bits of good manners he had once learned were returning to him since he had found Cynthia Reed in Dunder Falls. He stood gracefully, with his feet well placed, and looked down upon her. She was tall for a woman; but just right for him, he thought.

"You're worried about something," he said, after a moment of silence.

"Yes; but—how did you know?"

"It shows," said Renshaw, "in your eyes. Regular folks and dogs show how they feel in their eyes."

"I never heard that before!" she laughed. "I think I like to hear you talk—when you aren't swearing at the men!"

"Cussing is the only kind of talk they know!"

"I want you to do a little coaxing for me! Will you?"

"Is it—your brother, Philip?"

"Yes!"

"About his playing poker in the doghouse?"

"Yes."

Renshaw fell silent, staring at her with a line deepening between his eyes. Philip Reed was a hard problem to solve. Not that he cared how much money the wastrel son of old Jonas lost—that was the business of Jonas Reed.

But it hurt Cynthia, stabbed her anew every time her twin brother went down into Frenchy Patno's basement with money he had taken from the cash drawer in the store, and came up with empty pockets. If Jonas Reed knew, as he must, that his son was stealing from him, he never gave a sign that outsiders could see.

"Phil can't buck a gang of roughnecks in a poker game," said Renshaw. "He can't take care of himself."

"He's going down and down," murmured Cynthia. "There's that Boland girl; and he drinks too much. And this gambling is the worst of all. You must guess how he gets so much money to lose!"

"You don't need to tell me!" Renshaw ran worried fingers through the crispness of his hair. "I wish I could do something for you!"

"Save him!"

"You can't save a man," replied Renshaw, almost brusquely. "He's got to save himself."

"I'm sorry!" She flung back her head, and turned away. Wild Bill, with a hurt cry stifled in his throat, caught at her cape.

"Don't go!" He stammered before he found more words. "I spoke the wrong way. I'd do anything for you! I only meant I didn't believe anybody could do anything."

She halted, and, after a moment's hesitation, lifted her face to him again:

"I understand. But I don't agree with you. He can be helped."

"How? I'll throw him out of the dog-house, if you say so—box his ears—send him home!"

"Do you think I'd let you? Force never does any good!"

"Force?" Bill Renshaw chuckled dryly. "What keeps my gang together, and drives your father's logs?"

"You can't do anything with Philip that way!" she exclaimed.

"But you haven't been able to do anything any other way!"

"You're hard!" Her voice broke on the words, and that break was a wrench at the heart of Wild Bill. His thoughts whirled; but, after all, what was the use of lying? Lying might get Cynthia, but it would never keep her. And lying left a bad taste in his mouth.

"Facts are hard," he said, gruffly. "It makes me mad to see 'em bother you!"

Her hands clasped and pressed together; but what could he do for her except to take her brother across his knee and spank him?

"It's your work that's done this to you!" she said. "You have driven men, Bill Renshaw, until you think nothing can be done except by driving! My father—"

She fell silent, with her sentence unfinished, and Bill repressed a mad desire to chuckle. Old Jonas did not stand on a river bank and drive men to risk their lives; nor did he lead them over rolling logs with

a peavey clanking in his hand, and a ripping oath for each time that death was missed by an inch or a second.

But Jonas Reed held wages and profits on the river in his strong old fingers; and Wild Bill knew that if he himself failed in the service of Reed, a stronger boss would take his place. Cynthia knew. It was not necessary to remind her.

"I couldn't sit at a desk and handle over little pieces of paper all day," said Bill, quietly. "It's all right for your father. But me, I like to do things. To hold a gang together, to fight the river! To master it!"

"It's all so wrong!" she sighed. "You could have—been anything!"

The same thing was in the minds of both of them, Renshaw knew; and that was how he might have been able to marry the daughter of Jonas Reed. The difference between a flannel shirt and a white collar did not stand in the way, so far as she was concerned. It was something else, something more indefinite, and more nearly insurmountable.

"I'd be the same man, no matter what work I did," he told her. "I remember some Latin I read in high school—'*arma virumque cano!*'—they've always liked fighting men, Cynthia!"

"Oh, if you could only see the difference!" she cried. "The difference between your way of thinking and mine! Fighting is always wrong!"

"It works," said Bill.

"The only thing that works is love!"

"Love? Try it on Walleye Murphy, or Jock Bullis, or Butterball Tubs! Love—is—"

He drew in his breath, checking words which were running away with him. But when she leaned toward him in the twilight, so close that her shoulder brushed his arm, he let go of himself.

"What is it?" she whispered.

"You and me!" he cried, hoarsely, and held out his arms.

She withdrew herself again, swiftly.

"No, it's—everything," she said, in a dull tone. "You don't understand."

"I guess not!"

Silence, while she went slowly into the gathering darkness.

"Good night, Bill Renshaw!"

"Good night, Cynthia!"

Wild Bill stood alone upon the bridge. It seemed more than ever hopeless, now

that they had tacitly admitted that they cared for each other. The chasm between the village magnate's daughter and the boss of a gang of river drivers was not impassable, but how could Wild Bill Renshaw become woolly soft?

If he wanted to do it, he could not. How could he change Philip Reed? Cynthia talked folly; and yet, in her Renshaw perceived some nameless quality, as elusive and as delicate as spring, which he yearned impotently to grasp.

The stars were coming out. The night breeze flowed upon Bill, carrying the tang of the river. Up from the black depths underneath the bridge came the thunder and roar of mighty waters. Realization of the night pressed upon Renshaw, and his spirit surged upward with the wings of its strong, dark beauty. He laughed, and shrugged, and walked slowly toward Frenchy Pattino's place.

III

THE doghouse could be entered from the sidewalk by going down a flight of wooden steps, as well as from the interior of the building.

Stairs descended inside from the main floor, and, by means of these two exits, many a fast get-away had been made from Frenchy's basement. Renshaw decided to go down there, and find out whether young Reed was breaking himself against the canny poker players of the gang.

Light streamed mistily through the grimy panes set in the upper half of the door. Bill put his hand to the iron latch, and went in.

Tobacco smoke hung in drifting clouds, turned to a kind of golden haze by the kerosene lamps. The room, as usual, was filled with men sprawled over benches and broken chairs, humped on empty boxes, leaning against the scarred wall. Fire burned in the big box stove, and the air was drenched with the odors of drying wool, wet leather, hard-worked human bodies.

Under one of the lamps a poker game was going on. Joe the Swede, Jock Bullis, and Walleye Murphy were playing with Reed to-night. The piles of chips were large in front of the three river drivers. Renshaw studied, from a distance, the face of Cynthia's twin.

It was a face so much like hers, that it would have been hard to tell which was

Philip and which Cynthia, except for the difference in clothing.

Dark and delicate of feature, Philip was built with his sister's slenderness; and what was a good height for a woman became, for him, rather meager stature. Renshaw felt a momentary twinge of compassion. It might be that there was a streak of softness in old Jonas. He had not hardened his son.

Bill crossed the room with a nod, and a rough word of jovial greeting flung here and there. It seemed to him that there was tension at the poker table. Dark color was creeping into the cheeks of young Reed, and the other men were strangely grave. It was not thus that they were accustomed to take their winnings.

Renshaw did not intend to interfere when he came and stood near the players; not only would it have been extremely bad form, according to the standards of the river drivers, but he had no desire to nurse Philip Reed. A man had to look out for himself, and his own.

Suddenly the hands of Reed changed position, with lightning speed. His cards went down, his right hand dropped underneath the table, and the left shot out and grasped the wrist of Walleye Murphy.

"I've caught you this time!" he rasped. "You lifted one from the discard with those damned big paws of yours!"

An accusation of cheating, made in anger, was a serious thing. Renshaw did not know whether or not Murphy had cheated. What was important was that he had to do something to save his face, even against the son of the man who owned his job. With an oath, Walleye leaped to his feet and reached across the table.

Phil Reed sprang up and backward, and the hand that had disappeared under the table snapped out with a big clasp knife, open, and gleaming viciously in the lamp-light.

For his own sake, it was the worst move Reed could have made. If Walleye Murphy had done more than jam him against the battered plaster of the doghouse and demand retraction, some one would have interfered.

But, by the drawing of a weapon among men who scorned weapons other than their iron fists and spiked boots, he strained their tolerance to the breaking point. With a low roar, Walleye Murphy kicked the table away and made for him.

It was here that Bill Renshaw took part. He thrust an elbow under the chin of Murphy, with his weight behind it, and hurled the big river driver against the wall with an impact that shook the building.

Then Renshaw turned upon Philip. It was in his mind only to take the knife away, and, if necessary, force young Reed to go home. But he found the blade swinging against him, and, for what was nearly a disastrous instant, he was held motionless by astonishment.

The last thing Renshaw wanted to do was to lay violent hands upon Philip, but half automatically his arm straightened out. The big hand, open, and more in a gesture of defense than a blow, crashed into the face of Reed. There was a resounding smack. The boy staggered.

Bill wrenched the knife from his grasp, and, with a swift movement, caught him up from the floor, pinioning his arms. Then he walked out through the silent river drivers, carrying his writhing burden. Up to the sidewalk he climbed. There he set Philip down on his feet, and gave him a shove.

"Go home!" he said. "Some of these wild men will just about cave you in if you don't act decent!"

"You!" Reed choked, on the verge of tears. "I'll get you, and I'll get them!"

"Go on home!" repeated Renshaw, without anger. "I'm drawing pay to take care of a flock of logs, and I've got my hands full with that!"

Young Reed faded into the starlit night without another word; and, after a moment, Bill went slowly up to the main floor of Frenchy Pattne's.

He did not care to discuss in the doghouse what had just happened. Walleye would cool off, and if Reed behaved himself, the matter would be forgotten in a few days. That was what Renshaw believed as he took a smoky lamp and went up to his room; but he was to learn the next day that the matter would not be forgotten.

During the morning, Bill, having seen to it that logs were being let out of the boom above the mill pond with proper care, found himself with leisure to go to the store for smoking tobacco.

The ancient frame building with its weathered sign, which read, "Jonas T. Reed. General Merchandise," was deserted of loafers at that hour. Even those men

of Dunder Falls who were incompatible with work followed the drive as spectators, and so the store was mercifully cleared of an audience for what was to follow.

At the end of one of the long counters, there was a little group, which turned and faced Renshaw as he entered the dim interior. He walked forward easily, smiling as he recognized Jonas Reed and Cynthia and Philip. He saw Emory Tuttle, the narrow-shouldered clerk, move backward timorously behind the big heater. Silence greeted him.

The eyes of all of them were upon Bill. He noted, with a certain shock of regret, that one side of Philip's face was discolored, and the eye blackened. But it had been necessary to stop that slashing blade, unless he wanted to stand and take it; and so he kept his smile as he drew a dime from his pocket.

"Good morning," he said. "I'd like to get a paper of cut-plug smoking."

Jonas Reed took a mechanical step toward the shelves, but he halted as Cynthia moved forward, and stood peering into the face of Renshaw. She grew white to the lips as she pointed at Philip's eye.

"Did you do that?" she asked.

Slowly the smile faded from Bill's generous mouth. More than ever, he was struck by the resemblance between Cynthia and her twin. In height and breadth and coloring they were like medals from the same die, except that in the beardless face of Philip there was etched the record of a different life.

"They had some trouble in the doghouse last night, and I stopped it," replied Bill, steadily. "I didn't mean to hurt anybody."

"I thought so!" came in the cracked, dry voice of old Jonas. He reached for the tobacco.

"You can't handle my man-eating huskies with kind words!" exclaimed Renshaw, trying to laugh away the look which was burning him from the eyes of Cynthia.

"To strike a man who can't strike back!" she said, in a low, deliberate voice. The scorn of her words bit like live coals. "I never want you to speak to me again, Bill Renshaw! You coward!"

Jonas passed the paper of tobacco over the counter, but Renshaw did not see it. He was staring into the face of Cynthia Reed.

That for him there should be such utter

contempt in her gaze, made this the hardest moment of his life. There is no man so strong that he cannot be shaken by something. Wild Bill, who regarded death as a joke, and the approval of mankind as a matter of indifference, turned and walked out of the store with knees which threatened to give way under him at each step.

The stinging wind whipped him back to physical strength. It was Philip Reed who had done this! For the first time, Bill Renshaw hated a human being with that bitter hatred which brings with it a desire for extermination, for an utter blotting out.

He wished now that he had let Walleye manhandle Reed. It would have put Murphy out of work and Philip under the doctor's care, but it would have saved Bill Renshaw.

He went back to work, but his great muscles moved by instinct, and his voice shouted orders automatically. It was as though there were another person within him who sat and thought in dull sorrow of what might have been, perhaps, if it had not been for Philip Reed—if it were not for the tie that held Cynthia to her brother with her fatuous, woman's notion that love was other than the meeting of lips. The river boss drove his men hard that day.

IV

For many days thereafter Wild Bill Renshaw lived fully up to his name. Now it was he who took most of those chances which the river daily offered.

He took over care of the dynamite, and laid the charges when it was necessary to use it; he rode a log through white water on a bet, and himself broke such jams as could be moved by turning the key log with a cant hook. It seemed that he tried for destruction, and could not coax it to him.

But for the utter competence of Wild Bill, the men would have rebelled. He roared his orders no longer with the old, good-natured grin; now his commands hung saw-toothed upon the air, and once, when Joe the Swede made the mistake of growling a retort, Renshaw battered him until the rock-hard Scandinavian was laid up for a day in the boarding house.

The days marched slowly in Dunder Falls, and it was not only for Renshaw that the color had gone out of them. The clash and jangle of human wills and emotions

which had come because of Philip Reed had set all hearts beating out of tune.

When Cynthia appeared, she went along the sidewalk with quick but unelastic steps. Bill watched her covertly, aching with a vague anger against her, and fate, and all the world. But it was Philip whom he hated.

Jonas Reed no longer cracked his dry jokes when the men went to the store to draw money, or tobacco, or woolen socks. Even life in the doghouse was surly of an evening, and now and then there were hot words over a poker game.

An orgy was brewing. Renshaw realized it, and knew that it would not be one of the good-natured pay day blow-outs at which he had winked in the past for the sake of keeping the men contented. Even fat-stomached Frenchy Pattno had begun to grump.

Young Philip disappeared for a short time; and when he came back to Dunder Falls, a stranger came with him, a lean, hard-bitten man of forty, who wore the conventional costume of the "sport" of those days.

A small diamond stud gleamed in the gayly-colored bosom of his shirt; his necktie was small and black, and his collar very high. A square chin rode upon that collar, and above it a pair of cold, pale eyes regarded mankind with no particular friendliness.

Bill Renshaw made no protest when Philip introduced this man, who called himself Dick Morley, to the company of the doghouse; he said nothing when the two of them sat into the poker game.

It was not his business to interfere in the affairs of grown men, and he watched casually, leaning against the wall, while Morley made his preliminary moves for the fleecing of the river drivers.

That Morley was a professional gambler they all knew, and they delighted in flinging themselves into a battle in which they had no chance to win. High courage and great physical strength gave them a sublime and ridiculous willingness to fight anything on earth.

So Morley played, winning a little, and losing a little, and waited for whatever climax he had in mind. It seemed to Renshaw that he was waiting for pay day to clean out everybody, including Philip.

There is a parallel between events in human lives and the passing of logs over a

dam. The log comes down to smooth water above the dam, and it moves with deceptive slowness. The speed increases a little, but it does not appear that there is any haste in that movement.

Then, suddenly, the dark and glistening trunk becomes a projectile; it shoots forward with incredible rapidity, and plunges over the edge of the dam, to thunder down in a spume of churning water.

It was thus with the slow drama in Dunder Falls, which must inevitably come to some manner of climax, and yet which seemed to move with barely perceptible progress from day to day.

Morley and Philip played poker; pay day drew near; Cynthia was pale when she walked down the street with eyes straight ahead, and long skirts held daintily clear of the spring mud.

Old Jonas remained stoical; and Wild Bill hated his first real enemy with increasing bitterness. He had given up hope of Cynthia, a hope that at best had been a fragile thing. The force of his nature he now gave to hatred of Philip Reed, who had cost him that hope.

Wild Bill was too great a soul to let this hatred find expression in action. If Reed had been a man able to stand up to him in a fight, it would have been a different matter; but, as nature had made them, there was nothing that Renshaw could do.

He scorned a plotted revenge, as he scorned to lay hands upon a man defenseless by comparison. But he watched with satisfaction while the feet of Philip Reed led him on toward possible destruction.

Late in the afternoon of pay day one of the booms above the mill pond broke, and all the logs which that boom had held went over the dam.

In a stretch of rapids below the village they jammed badly, tumbled up like a heap of giant jackstraws, and, after Renshaw had climbed over the forest of locked timber and found that he would have to use dynamite, he cursed his gang from the least to the greatest. Time lost and good logs smashed.

He got his charge ready, fifteen sticks tied at the end of a pole, and even put in the cap, and a short length of fuse. Then good judgment restrained him, for darkness was thickening over the river, and if the men could not see to nurse the logs down the river, another jam might form.

That night Frenchy Pattno's place vi-

brated with excitement. All except a small handful of elderly men had drawn their full pay for the purpose of spending it, and that morning an emissary had been sent to the nearest town where there was a saloon. When Renshaw went down into the basement after supper, he found a celebration in full swing.

Jugs sat in corners, carefully sheltered from heavy feet. The habitual roar of big Jock Bullis, a beefy man of gigantic proportions, had reached a crescendo that rode the clamor of the room as thunder rides the heavens. The eyes of Joe the Swede were beginning to glow with blue fire; and Zeno Grimes, a somber, rawboned, rough-and-tumble fighter of reputation, was emerging from his shell of exclusiveness.

In the center of the room a big game had started, and to-night there was real money, instead of chips, on the table. The square, chalky face of Dick Morley rose through the murk of smoke.

Philip Reed bent over his cards, with a quick upward glance now and then from the eyes which were so much like those of his sister, and yet were not like them. The boss watched for a few minutes, and then went out into the refreshing coolness of the night.

V

THE moon was freeing itself from a little bank of clouds. When the light shone clear about Renshaw, giving a touch of enchantment even to the time-worn building behind him, he saw a woman's form move in the shelter of the porch. Instantly he recognized that outline, and, with a bound, he stood beside Cynthia Reed. She looked up at him inscrutably.

"You'd better go home," he said. "You know what the night of pay day is—and it's no place for a woman here."

"Is Philip down there with Morley?" she asked, in an even voice.

"Yes."

"They'll take the men's money."

"And the men will deal with them!" replied Bill, grimly.

"I'm going to get Philip!"

"I won't let you, Cynthia!"

That battle of wills for a moment seemed to last forever. She turned and went away, around the angle of the building. Renshaw shrugged, and set his teeth together, and walked to his favorite post on the bridge.

Not a stone's throw from the boarding house, he watched until he saw the figure of Cynthia detach itself from the shadows and go slowly up the street. He hoped she had realized that her presence there would only make additional trouble.

The game would go on as long as there was money to play with, and men sober enough to play. Renshaw settled himself upon a beam, and waited. The night had worn down almost to nothing when he decided that it was time for him to go back to the doghouse.

Dawn would be coming soon, and he wanted to see how many men he could count on for work. Perhaps, after all, nothing had happened. It might be either that the shearer had not been successful, or that the sheep had taken the shearing in drunken good nature.

In the instant before he swung back the door of the doghouse, Renshaw was conscious of some unusual condition. Coincident with his realization that this condition was silence, a startling thing in that place, he stood upon the threshold, and looked into the thick, dim air of the basement.

There followed that frozen moment which comes when a man looks upon unexpected drama; and during that little space of time, Renshaw grasped the scene before him. He had come while events still hung in suspension, as an ax hangs in the air before it falls.

Philip Reed stood, backed against the wall, crouching, with a knife in his hand. Around him, in a rough semicircle, the packed river drivers leaned forward in brief hesitation before they closed; and it was no fear of the naked blade that held them back. Bill Renshaw understood. Philip was showing something of the Reed quality now. Morley, the gambler, was not in sight.

"Hand over the money!" roared Jock Bullis. "You and that skunk that jumped out the winder took it with marked cards!"

"Aw, Morley's got the money!" growled Zeno Grimes. "I'm going to take mine out of Reed's hide!"

They pressed in a little. Philip's lips drew back, but he said not a word. Joe the Swede lifted a broken chair, and shook it above his head.

"I bane going to smash dis feller!" he yelled.

An hour before Bill had thought that he would be glad to see Philip Reed bring

himself to this end. In the few seconds that passed while he stood in the doorway he learned something new to him. He learned that it is one thing to hate a man, and another to see that man in desperate need.

Suddenly he caught the eyes of Philip, and saw in them something that was like pitiful, uplifted hands. As a dam bursts, so the bonds which had held his sympathy burst.

The living waters of understanding rose within Wild Bill Renshaw. He saw the madness and the folly of exacting blood for injury.

Beating the flesh of Philip Reed would restore nothing. That white face against the background of dirty plaster filled the heart of Renshaw. A fellow mar was silently calling for help across an abyss of hatred.

Wild Bill rose upon his toes and launched himself. No one had heeded him. Now he struck the broad backs with the force of a battering-ram. The first two men crashed to the floor. An extended foot and a wicked elbow sent another spinning dizzily.

Renshaw snapped the knife from Philip and flung it away. Then he struck, right and left, at the two nearest faces. The way to the door leading up into the boarding house was cleared for a fraction of a second.

He jammed Reed through the doorway, and slammed the door upon the clutching fingers of other men.

"Upstairs and out!" he grunted. "I'll hold 'em!"

Philip obeyed, but, as he cleared the first three stairs at a bound, his head turned, and he threw a word behind him.

"Thanks!"

Thunder of boots against the door. It crashed inward, and big Jock Bullis was the first man through.

Wild Bill began to be drunk with battle. He whooped joyously, and kicked Bullis in the stomach. Over the fallen giant leaped Joe the Swede.

Bill yielded a couple of steps to let Joe gain impetus. Then he struck straight from the shoulder, and the nose of Joe the Swede was a smear as he disappeared backward among his fellows.

Renshaw ran lightly up to the head of the stairs. Already he had gained seconds for Philip, and a few more ought to be

enough. A packed mass struggled up the stairway.

Bill saw a chest of drawers beside him in the hall. With a yell, he lifted it and hurled it down upon the upward-surg-ing attack. Then he turned, in the belief that enough of a victory had been won, laugh-ing, swinging upon a wave of intoxication. But at the second step he halted, furious.

"I told you to run, you fool!" he roared to the slim, pale-faced figure which confronted him. "They'll kill you now, Reed, if they get hands on you!"

"I'll go!" came in a panting whisper. "But they—they're coming in at the front door now!"

"Damnation!" Wild Bill swung his charge, with no gentle hand, into the nearest room. He flung up a window, and leaped out into the darkness. Soft turf, as he had thought. He straightened, and called to the window above:

"Come on! It's an easy jump!"

A thud beside him. The room behind them clattered with feet and boiled with curses. Then they were running together—Renshaw tempered his pace to that of the smaller form beside him—down the river, through the gray darkness, for that was the only way to go. In the village they would be sure to be caught.

As he ran, Bill tried to grasp the situation, to find a way out. The thing was to get Philip to a place of safety. For himself it did not matter. He could hold his own, and when the men cooled a little, they would not be dangerous to him.

From the rear came yells of triumph. Renshaw looked over his shoulder, and saw a bobbing lantern on the river bank.

The gang knew, then, which way the fugitives had gone. They could run them down. The breathing beside Bill had become hard, gasping. Besides, it was getting light. The east had begun to pale, and houses and trees were standing away from the background of night.

VI

BILL saw the ragged outline of the jam ahead, and with that sight a thought came to him. If he could put the river between pursued and pursuers!

Why not? He knew where the charge of dynamite that he had prepared lay under a shelter of boards, hidden by bushes. Why not cross on the jam, and break it behind them?

Let the pack bay on the river bank! He would search Philip to see if any of the river drivers' money was on him, get a horse, head him for the nearest railroad station!

The tangle of logs loomed beside them. Renshaw ran down the bank, dragging his companion by a limp arm. The waters roared and pounded in their ears. Bill dashed into a thicket, and his hands found what they sought, a pole with a bundle of sticks, oily to the touch, fastened at one end. He cupped his hands and shouted, to make himself heard above the river.

"We'll cross the jam, and blow it up behind us! Go ahead! And make your feet track fast, boy!"

An instant of hesitation, hands upflung in the semidarkness. Then the dim form jumped from shore to the tight-wedged mass of logs. Bill followed; of necessity slowly, and with a trace of scorn for that scrambling progress ahead of him. The fugitive slipped, sprawled sometimes to hands and knees, but always rose and went on.

Renshaw knew where to halt, for he had learned the intricacies of that jam the day before. He waited, straining his eyes in the gray light until he saw his charge scramble up the opposite bank, to fall and lie exhausted there.

Then Bill turned. The noise of the pursuit had begun to make itself heard in the medley of the river. A jumble of men appeared in the growing day.

Bill lighted the fuse, which gave him a half minute to reach safety. He placed the dynamite carefully, and then went, leaping from stick to stick, toward solid earth.

He stood beside the figure on the bank, sitting up now, and spun around to watch. A shout rose above the noise of churning waters.

Then a flash of yellow light leaped up to meet the dawn. Dark shapes of logs rose against the sky, turning in air, and went down again where that momentary flash had been. A booming detonation smote the ears.

That dark mass in the river shifted to the eye; it groaned, and jerked forward, and in a handful of seconds the logs were pounding and upending as they chased each other in the mad current.

A great plaque of rose and gold spread above the eastern mountains.

Wild Bill Renshaw saw the baffled faces

of his men upon the opposite shore. He laughed, and waved a friendly arm at them. Then he turned and looked down at shaken shoulders, at the crown of a soft hat crushed upon a bowed head. He felt sorry for Philip Reed.

"Oh, stand up!" growled Bill. "You're all right now! Damn it, man, stand up!"

He slipped his hands under arms which suddenly became tight locked against his fingers. He had lifted that slight form before he understood. He whirled it around, gripping delicate shoulders gently, and stared down into dark, wet eyes.

"Cynthia!" he gasped.

Now he saw, in this calmer moment, with light to aid him, that long hair had been drawn up out of sight; he noted delicacy of hand and foot, and that rare sweetness of expression which made her different from her brother.

"I knew he'd be in danger!" she panted, struggling with the reaction which had come upon her. "I wanted to give him a chance to get away—to take his place—there was no one else to help him!"

"I went home and put on a suit of his clothes—and waited down there—and when you got him out of the basement, my chance came!"

"While you were fighting, I made him go—he'll be on a train now—with a new start somewhere! And, oh, Bill Renshaw! I shall thank you all my life for what you've done this night!"

A confused yell turned their heads toward the opposite shore. Morley was be-

ing propelled from the direction of the village. It was Zeno Grimes who dived into his pockets, and, after a moment of suspense, shook a double handful of greenbacks in the air. They emptied him of money; then Jock Bullis lifted an enormous foot, and drove the gambler a dozen yards on his way to some other place.

"They'll be all right now," muttered Renshaw. "I guess Morley trimmed Phil, too!"

"But they'd have killed him if it hadn't been for you!" said Cynthia.

Wild Bill felt the blood climbing to his face as he met her star-eyed gratitude.

"Cynthia," he said, "maybe I've been wrong! Fighting for Phil Reed was a funny thing for me to do!"

"Are you sorry?" she asked, in a low voice.

"Sorry?" he echoed. Her eyes were shining, but not with tears. "I guess I kind of—liked him—all of a sudden!"

"Oh, Bill!" she cried. "Now you know! Now you understand! There's more than—just you and me!"

"Yes!" He trembled a little at what he saw in her face. His big arms shook as he drew her to him, fearfully, at first doubting the joy that was filling him as sunrise was filling the world with glory. Then suddenly it seemed natural and right that her lips should meet his, yielding all their sweetness willingly.

"And Bill," she whispered, after an interval, "maybe I was just a little bit wrong—it certainly was a great fight!"

SEA LEARNING

THERE lay a plank or twain between
Where leagues of waters wandered green,
And to the left and to the right
Great winds walked with me day and night

Or harried after in pursuit—
Winds that had plucked me down like fruit
If hands had not clung tight until
Body and soul became one will!

Sent up to let the topsails out,
With miles of ocean round about
And but a rope beneath my feet,
Not solid ground nor paven street—

Before my days at sea began
I thought that I was quite a man;
But when the land began to fade
I learned of what things men are made!

Harry Kemp

Karan

THIS LOVELY MALAYAN WATER NYMPH CAME TRUSTINGLY
ASHORE TO GRACE A WHITE MAN'S HEARTHSTONE—
AND TRAGEDY STALKED IN HER TRAIN

By H. de Vere Stacpoole

MURRAY, coming out to Singapore, had met Van Heyut on the steamship *Princess Juliana*. Van Heyut was a big, mild mannered, persuasive, and prosperous looking Dutchman. One of the features of his face was a cigar, and of his conversation, when speaking the English tongue, the expression: "Now, I'll tell you."

"Now, I'll tell you," Van Heyut said, as they stood on the spar deck after dinner one night, "Singapore is no good to you, no good to you at all. It is not new enough. For a settled business, yes, but for a man who is making out on his own affairs, no, no—no good at all."

"Where shall I go?" Murray asked, idly.

"Come down to Timor. That is the place for you. We are growing coconut trees. A coconut tree is like a cow, it gives milk, but, unlike a cow, it does not want food; unlike a cow, it gives also copra, which is the inside of a coconut dried in the sun, but it is much more than the inside of a coconut dried in the sun; it is the great desire of the soap companies, for it contains a natural fat, and the Lever Brothers and the Fifth National Oil Company and Boerhavers, all these pay dollars for it."

"And where do I get all this?"

"Now, I'll tell you; there is land of my own I would let or sell you, not far from Koepang, where the trees are in production. Timor is a long island, one-half Portuguese, one-half Dutch, and the Dutch half isn't the worst."

Van Heyut laughed as he finished tipping his cigar ash over the rail into the dark sea.

Cape Gardafui was far behind, and the starlit foam of the Indian Ocean lay behind the *Princess Juliana* like a ghostly road homeward leading, but to be trodden by no man.

"Thanks," Murray said. "If I don't like Singapore, I'll remember what you say."

In the result he didn't like that city. Singapore has a special brand of heat all its own, or so it seemed to Murray; also, the man he had come out to see, with a view to starting in business, disappointed him.

Calmeyer, in England, appeared quite a different person from the same individual out here, and a half hinted warning to have nothing to do with Calmeyer, received from a rubber man in the bar of the hotel, completed the matter.

At a loose end, not knowing what to do, the memory of Van Heyut arose before Murray. Why not try Timor?

He saw at once the truth of the Dutchman's words. Singapore was too old and settled a place for a man fresh from Europe, and with a small capital, to do much good in. It was expensive, full of financial sharks, and, over and above all, he disliked the place.

Murray was a man of impulse. Packing his traps, and taking a Dutch boat, he reached Koepang, and from that town a small coastal steamer took him to the Ortang river and the home of Van Heyut—and paradise.

The broad, slowly flowing tidal river, the trees mirroring themselves in the water, the colored birds, the peace that said nothing of tropic storms, the azure sky that told naught of the rains—here was paradise.

The whitewashed bungalow of the Dutchman, and the welcome extended by the latter, detracted nothing from the general impression of the place.

"Now, I'll tell you, this is good," Van Heyut declared, with the air of a father greeting a lost son. "You will stay with me, and I will show you all my place and the land adjoining. You will see the trees for yourself, and the chance for a young man who, with a little capital, may reach out."

Murray stayed with Van Heyut in the white bungalow, and was shown all the place and the land adjoining, and the trees. Before a fortnight was out he had bought, investing half his capital, a stretch of land adjoining that in cultivation by the plausible Dutchman.

On the near edge of this land Van Heyut put him up a bungalow—at a price. The two bungalows were less than half a mile apart. "So we will be companions," Van Heyut remarked.

And they were. The Dutchman engaged servants for Murray—Java boys, turbaned, silent, yellow, ever ready to oblige, yet seeming to be from another planet.

Along this river there were strange people, not natives of Timor, but descendants of sea Dyaks strayed here in the long ago. One of these, an old man named Timara, looked after the boat which Murray bought for pleasure trips, and which he kept at a little landing stage opposite his house. Timara, although an able and willing boatman, was like the Java servants, apparently from another world.

For company's sake, Murray often went over to the Dutchman's in the evenings, and they would smoke and play cribbage, Van Heyut generally winning. This man was good at games, and, after some months, Murray began to wonder what his real game was in life.

Van Heyut grew coconut trees for copra, but he was often absent at Koe pang, and had strange people to visit him. They were Portuguese men with rings in their ears, and Malays with whom he seemed quite familiar; persons who appeared entirely unconnected with the peaceful business of copra growing.

II

ONE day Murray, going down to Koe pang, met a Yankee who, on hearing Van Heyut's name, looked disgusted.

"That bum!" the Yankee exclaimed. "Don't you have anything to do with him. He's in with all the shore-along crowd; opium, stolen pearls, women, and what not. Sold you trees? Well, he's sold you, anyhow. Round here there is no use for copra. Yes, the coconut trees are there, but they're bad bearing. He's done you, and you could get your money back in the courts—but don't try. Swallow your medicine and get out. Why? Because he'd knife you, or get one of his crowd to do the trick, or have you given a dose of poison, that's why."

Murray could not believe this, and frankly said so.

"Maybe," the Yankee replied; "but you'll come to believe a lot if you stay long beside that chap. He'll milk you dry, and when he's done with you, and you show signs of squealing, they'll find you in the river. Whatever you do, don't let on that you suspect him; pretend to be a fool, and when you see I'm in the right, clear out!"

All of which Murray absorbed, rejecting naturally the flamboyant warning of assassination, yet somehow not so sure in his mind. The fact is that, although Van Heyut had seemed a good fellow on board ship, Murray had never quite cottoned to him; and, even if the Dutchman had been most friendly during the last few months, the two men had never quite become real companions.

It was as if there might be a barrier between them that could not be crossed. And, in truth, there was.

Murray discovered it not long after the Yankee had given him warning. Van Heyut was a rogue. The land purchased from him was not worth one-tenth the price paid for it.

Copra here was a useless proposition, for, although some trees bore well, palm did not flourish on that land. On top of this, the Dutchman had done him in the building of the bungalow, in the erection of the little landing stage for the boat, in this and in that, including the price of provisions. Van Heyut, out of the ostensible goodness of his heart, had consented to supply the newcomer with food, drink, and tobacco, "at the same prices I pay out myself in Koe pang to the wholesalers."

Van Heyut had robbed him in large things and in little. The evidence was plain, and Murray was a man to strike.

Yet he held his hand. A row with the

Dutchman, leaving aside that fantastic talk of assassination, was impossible.

Life on the river would be impossible without another white man within reach. Although Murray only went over to the Dutchman's now and again these days, he knew he could go when he wanted to, and that was everything. It didn't matter that Van Heyut was a swindler; at least it did not affect the fact that he had a white skin.

You will know exactly how Murray felt if you have ever spent a night alone in a house suspected of harboring ghosts. This place was haunted by the ghost of Asia.

You could glimpse it in the strange alien spirit peeping from an imperturbable yellow face; you could hear it in the beating of gongs amid the wooded hills; you could smell it in the odor of champak flowers and burning prayer papers.

I don't know of any book that stresses this baleful effect of the East on the lonely white man, this occidental soul sickness with all its power and poignancy. It was enough to keep Murray from a break with Van Heyut for the moment.

He said to himself: "Yes, I'll go for him and make him disgorge—but not just yet."

At heart, Murray knew that he had not the money, time, or disposition to fight this matter out in the Dutch courts. He decided mentally therefore: "I will stick here and advertise, and be on the lookout for something else."

He found something else a few days later, but it was not that for which he was looking.

III

THE boat that he kept tied up to the little landing stage had a mast and sail, and the river was broad enough just here to enable him to beat against the wind when it was blowing downstream.

One day, rounding a sharp little cape above and beyond his land, he came on an empty canoe, evidently at anchor. Less than a half minute elapsed between his sighting of this craft and the moment when, gliding up to it, he placed his hand on the gunwale.

Looking underneath, he saw something in the water, some one scrabbling about on the river bed. It was a girl.

The next moment she arose as a bubble rises, clutched the opposite canoe side with her right hand, and tossed the wet hair

aside from her eyes. Her left hand held two huge mussels.

As she tossed her glistening black hair, it was as though to see Murray more clearly. She had come up for air, but it was almost as if she had actually risen to look at him, a naiad of the East drawn from her river by a man.

The girl was sinewy and lithe, very young, almost immature, with perfect teeth, and eyes deep and dark and as forthright looking as the eyes of a warrior. She was the most fascinating creature that Murray had ever come across.

The girl belonged evidently to the same tribe as Timara, and, as Murray soon found, spoke the same tongue. She cast the mussels in the bottom of the canoe; then, after a word of greeting and a backward look at him, she dived again.

It was the backward glance that did for Murray. He hung on, waiting for her reappearance, watching her as one might watch a fish beneath the water.

When she came up he spoke to her again, and she clung to the canoe while they talked. He had picked up a good deal of the language from Timara, and it is wonderful how few words are necessary to make oneself understood in a situation like this. Of course, one is helped by that oldest sign language in the world, the way of a man with a maid.

Her name was Karan, and she was the daughter of Tubai. She was gathering mussels on the chance of finding pearls in them. She could not tell him this, because they had no common word for pearls, but she showed him.

The girl came leg over gunwale without upsetting it. Naked, except for a waist cloth, she crouched, dripping, beside the little heap of mussels already gathered, and began opening them with a knife whose blade was only two inches long.

The tenth mussel gave up a small pearl, irregular in shape, and of little value. She held it in the palm of her hand, and looked up at him. He took the fingers of the outstretched hand and held them for a moment as he looked at the pearl.

There was nothing in any of the other mussels. This wretched find, for which a Chinese would probably give her a half dollar, was the sole result of her fishing, yet she seemed content.

When she pulled up her anchor, he accompanied her in his boat upstream for a

quarter of a mile, to where a few palmetto thatched roofs showed among the tree ferns. Casuarina trees and a great flame tree grew near the roofs, and there was a little bamboo landing stage to which an empty canoe was moored. This was Karan's home.

He watched her land and tie up, and as she went off among the trees she looked back at him.

He met her again next day; and the following night, just as the fireflies were beginning their dance, he stood on his landing stage in answer to a half-spoken hint.

A canoe came downstream, silent, and followed by a water trickle, like a swimming otter. A paddle flashed, and the craft came to the landing stage.

A moment later Karan was in Murray's arms, gasping and clinging to him like a drowning creature.

They had never spoken a word of love. It was collision; the dashing together of two beings drawn by a force resistless as the power of gravity.

IV

It was as though they had been making their way toward each other for all time, she by the simple route of the forests and the rivers of the East, and he by all the complicated roads that have made up the track of Western civilization.

Now, Murray was the descendant of a stern and straight-living race, and not the man for what they call in the East "this sort of thing." He had very strict ideas as to the relations between men and women, ideas so set and stable that a geographical fact left them quite unshaken.

He married Karan. The ceremony was performed by an old broken-down Dutch missionary who had left the missionary business and gone in for other business in Koepang.

The whole thing was legally a farce, but it was the best thing Murray could do. He could not bring Karan into Koepang for a civil marriage, and, as she belonged to no religion, he could not bring a parson out to his plantation. Yes, it was the best he could do, and he did it to satisfy something—respectability or convention, to give it its other name.

He loved Karan. His whole heart and soul had gone out to her. He would love her forever, so he told himself; and while that love lasted, he would never leave her.

All the same, strong as the sentimental bond was, he had had it overlaid as best he could by Andreas Tergon, the missionary, at a fee of ten guilders. When Tergon had departed, Murray felt eased in mind. He had done the right thing.

Van Heyut, when he was told about this business, laughed. Then he came over to see the newly-wed couple, and approved of Karan, evidently, to judge by his manner and his eye.

He questioned her, asked how it was that he had never seen her before, as he knew all the river people for five miles up and down, and she replied that she had only recently come to this district, she and her father, Tubai, and her little brother, Kling. They had come to live with her Uncle Marop, the net maker.

"Ah, him!" Van Heyut remarked. "I know him."

He took his departure, and, as a wedding present, sent a box of cigars. They were large black cigars that Karan smoked along with her husband.

During this honeymoon, Murray let drop for a moment all the plans that had been forming in his mind for the future. The morning before he fell in with Karan, he had quite determined to flee Timor, leaving this land he had bought in the hands of an agent at Koepang to sell for any price, quit and get free of Van Heyut and the whole business.

But Karan had altered all that. He could not take her along to Australia or New Zealand. He could not take her to Sumatra or Java. He could not take her to any European settlement.

Not only was she a native woman, but she was out of our civilization. A good thing to be out of, you may say. All the same, there it was. She was a river girl.

Now, if I were to bring you a story of a man who had discovered and mated with a water nymph, you would say: "How absurd!" Yet this is virtually what Murray had done. Karan was as remote from our civilization as any old Greek's mythical naiad, and she was a water nymph by nature and career.

The river was her true home, and she could not be divorced from it. She would have followed Murray, no doubt, wherever he led her, but he could only have led her to unhappiness, to incongruity, to disdain—maybe to death.

She would disappear in the morning into

the river, and he would see her head far out as she swam. It would vanish and then pop up like a duck after a long dive.

She would bring him fish, big langoustes, mussels, trepang. After awhile, she brought in her train some of her relatives, and their friends followed.

Little Kling would tie his canoe up to the landing stage, and strange river folk would touch there and be received by Karan. Murray would talk to them, at first holding his white man's distance, then more familiarly, picking up their language with incredible rapidity, and their ways and methods of thought.

A dispassionate observer might have said: "This man is going native." Well, he might have been right. At all events, Murray no longer felt lonely, or at a loss, or had that craving for the sight of his own kind that had driven him into the society of Van Heyut.

As a matter of fact, these river people, alien as they were, and barred from all white methods and ways, had in them something of a finer stuff than could be found in the dough of Van Heyut or the traders of Koepang. Beside Karan's friends, the ringed Portuguese, the low Dutch and the Malays that visited Van Heyut on dubious business were as the beasts that perish utterly.

Going native as he might be, Murray was happy. There was no money to be made from copra, but here money was of little account.

He began to plant a little garden, assisted by his wife's relatives. There was fruit for the picking, and the river supplied fish.

He ceased going to Van Heyut's at night, to lose money at cards. He ceased buying supplies from the Dutchman. Living in a simple manner, he no longer required a number of things, and he bought his coffee and tobacco through Karan's uncle at a fifth of what he had paid before.

He was quite happy, but Van Heyut was not.

V

MURRAY was a dead fly, and the spider was anxious to get rid of the carcass from the web, and to prepare it for new game.

Also, there was Karan.

The Dutchman had been greatly taken by the first sight of the girl. He had seen a great number of these mixed marriages

that inevitably had the same result—desertion by the white man.

Also, he knew in his low-down mind that the native girl always was "nothing." She was a creature to be attracted by the glint of a brassy bracelet, the glitter of a fake diamond, or the ticking of a cheap watch.

With Murray gone, the land sold to him could be bought back for next to nothing, nearly worthless as it was, to be prepared for a new customer. And Karan would be left.

One evening Murray was coming home, and, just at the moment before sunset, as he was passing a dense growth where a spur of the forest came down almost to the water, something passed his head like a streak of light.

Whit!

Made alert by the sound, he saw something vibrating on the trunk of a Casuarina tree right before him. It was a knife handle. Coming from behind him, the weapon had passed close to his ear and found the tree.

It was imbedded an inch—a Portuguese knife, narrow-bladed, double-edged, with a ribbon of fluting down the center of the blade.

Murray was not fool enough to hunt in the thick jungle for the thrower. He went home, taking the knife with him.

He told Karan. She made no demonstration of joy at his escape, as a European woman would have done.

She examined the knife carefully, and put it on a shelf by the door of their bedroom. Then she went on with the work at which she had been interrupted, the preparation of rice for a curry.

After all, why should Karan make any demonstration? A knife had been thrown at her man, but it could not have hit him simply because it had not hit him. What is, is. What will be, will be.

Here in Timor death was always playing about in all sorts of forms, colored, winged, crawling. The lightning withered, and the snake struck at the appointed time, and none other.

To Murray, it appeared that the girl did not care much. It was the first revelation of the fact that he had mated with a being whose mental make-up was fundamentally different to his own.

He said no more on the subject of the knife, and tried to dismiss it from his mind. Some one had attempted his life; it might

be a low caste Portuguese or a Malay, with the simple intent of robbery.

It might be this or that, but behind the veil of uncertainty he saw, or fancied that he saw, Van Heyut. The Dutchman's manner had been changed of late, effusive but strained.

Why the effusion? Murray had stopped dealing with him, and rarely went to his house.

He remembered what the Yankee had said long ago at Koepang. And now, trying to dismiss the matter of the thrown blade from his mind was of no use, quite the reverse—as well try to dismiss sleeplessness itself.

Sitting alone, Murray would brood over the thing. It is bad to feel that one's life is wanted; that the death that comes to all men by way of nature is trying to find us by way of art. Worse it is to have to remain waiting, not knowing, unresisting, and dreading.

Karan's seeming indifference to the affair had put Murray strangely at fault. Brooding, it seemed to him that this companion for whom he would have given his life, had moved away from him; that there had arisen between them a viewless barrier. He fancied, rightly or wrongly, that her manner had changed.

Once he came upon her suddenly as she was seated on a mat outside the house, with her knees clasped by her hands, her gaze fixed on the river, and her brows contracted. She seemed in angry or discontented thought. He had never seen her like that before.

One day, at the hour of siesta, looking out by chance he saw her on the landing stage. She was talking to some one who had pulled a canoe alongside.

It was Achmat, one of Van Heyut's men. Murray knew Achmat well by sight.

The two were talking and talking. Now and then Karan cast a glance back at the house as if to see whether she was observed by her husband.

He did not speak about this business, but it remained in his mind. He did not ask her any questions as to her occasional disappearances.

Now, when a couple live together as these two lived, alone and isolated, they talk two languages. One is the language of ordinary speech, and the other the voiceless speech which is made up of heaven knows what—nothing—telepathy.

Through this second tongue, Karan seemed to divine that something was wrong with Murray. Through it, he knew that something was on her mind.

VI

ONE day, returning with her from the river, he found on the floor of the living room a huge shallow basket in which lay two durian fruit.

Now the durian, beloved of the ordinary native, was never touched by the river folk. Some one had left this present, then, for him, and not for Karan.

But there had been three fruit in that basket. The ordinary durian is as big as a man's head; these of a smaller variety were about half that size, yet heavy enough to leave an impression on the bed of leaves at the bottom of the basket.

Some one had taken the third fruit.

While they were standing there, remarking this fact to each other, Chaya, the girl who helped Karan in the cooking, came running in. She was crying out that Tibu was dying.

Tibu was the upland boy who helped Chaya to keep the house clean, who fetched water from the well, and did odd jobs about the place.

Tibu, coming into the house and seeing the durians in their basket, and knowing that he was unwatched, had fallen.

Tribes have gone to war over the possession of a durian tree. Tibu did not go to war with himself. He seized the ripest and best of the three fruits and retired to the grove with it, taking with him a knife to cut the rind.

Twenty minutes later, just before the return of Murray and Karan, Chaya, going out to hang up a dishcloth to dry, found Tibu. He had crawled out from among the trees. He appeared paralyzed.

He held one of the great pips of the fruit in his hand. He told her what he had done, said that he was poisoned, and then became convulsed.

He was dead when Murray and Karan reached him.

The thing was plain. The fruit had been poisoned and left for the white man. By whom?

The body was placed in a sheltered spot, and Murray sent a servant to Koepang to acquaint the authorities. He well knew that nothing would result from that.

On the shelf by the door of the bedroom lay the Portuguese knife that had nearly killed Murray. In the grove was the remnant of the durian, which would have killed him.

What would the next attempt be, and with what subtle weapon?

As he sat at supper that night with Karan, he asked himself this. Also, a more terrible question came to him. Did Karan know anything of the matter?

The change he had noticed in her for some time past was accentuated to-night. She was gloomy and distraught. Naturally, the death of Tibu would affect her, but it seemed more than that. Was her conscience affected, as well as her peace of mind?

What did he know of her really? Beyond the veil of racial difference, what did there lie unknown to him?

Always in these mixed unions there is this problem: Can two beings, poles apart racially, be absolutely joined—even by the magic of love? Can they ever really understand each other?

That night, waking just before midnight, Murray found that his wife was no longer beside him.

VII

He could see the room vaguely through the gauze of the mosquito net. The moon was bright outside, and a ray fell through a crack on the reed curtains that hung at the open doorway.

She had left him. Why?

It was as though all the events of the last weeks had been the footsteps of some monster crawling toward him. Now it was preparing to spring.

Van Heyut!

He recalled again the bar where the Yankee had warned him against the Dutchman; he saw again the knife sticking in the Casuarina tree; he visualized the stricken body of Tibu.

He saw Karan talking to Achmat. Had she left him for Van Heyut? Would this man, who dealt so freely and safely with death, repeat the attempt to-night?

Ah, it was quite plain! The durian fruit had failed, and Karan had gone to tell Van Heyut of the failure.

Her manner on coming to bed— She had not tried to put her arm around him or touch him. She had lain, scarcely breathing, but surely thinking.

Suspicion, that ghost whose subtle food can be so infinitesimal—crumbs of suggestion—had suddenly a full loaf to feed on. And he was lying there without a weapon, should any attack come.

There was nothing in the house to defend himself with. Then he remembered the knife on the shelf. It was as though Providence had intended to arm him with the identical weapon that had attempted his destruction.

He slipped from under the mosquito net and stood on the floor.

The dead silence of the house was broken only by the ticking of a beetle. And now, from outside, came a voice—the cry of a night fishing hawk.

He went to the shelf. The knife was gone!

He ran the palm of his hand all along the shelf. It was empty. He could not recall when he had seen it there last, but the fact remained—it was there no longer.

Had Karan taken it? Had she deprived him of his only weapon?

He stood, trying to think of some way to escape; of any method of defense.

There were ordinary dinner knives in the drawer of the table in the next room—useless things for mortal combat.

Then he remembered something else. He hastened to a box in the corner of the room and opened it.

It contained a lot of oddities, including an obsidian spearhead with a bit of the shaft attached. It was a South Sea weapon that he had picked up as a curiosity at Koepang. The cutting edges were as keen as a razor.

With this he went back, got under the mosquito net, and lay down. He was on his back, with the primitive weapon in his right hand. The quilt over him left his striking arm free.

The moon drifted, and the light left the reed curtain and touched the wall. But he could see a glimmer showing in the next room.

The weapon in his hand gave him assurance. After all, it was unlikely that Van Heyut would make a direct attack. There were so many indirect ways of dealing out death in Timor, that he would scarcely risk coming himself to do the job or trusting it to a subordinate who might blunder.

Time passed. Once he dropped off to sleep for a moment, awaking again with a start. Then again he dropped off for a

longer time; how long he could not tell. It might have been an hour, half an hour, or a quarter.

But when he awoke, some one was just in the act of slipping in beside him on the left-hand side. Before he could fully realize what was happening, an arm came around him caressingly.

It was Karan. He could feel the bangle on the arm, and smell the curious sweet perfume of her hair.

She thought he was asleep. He felt her move, and her lips pressed against his cheek in a kiss. Then she sank down again with a sigh of contentment.

He lay for awhile, breathing as if he were asleep, cursing himself for a fool and a traitor for his suspicions of this creature who loved him. After awhile, rousing as if from sleep, he managed to slip the spear-head beneath the mattress, so that she would know nothing of it.

Then he turned and, putting his arm around her, spoke her name. Her lips met his.

VIII

KARAN arose first in the morning, and when Murray was alone, he put the spear-head away in the box. Its cruel edges seemed part of the wrong he had done her; he would have destroyed the thing if he could.

He heard her singing outside. She had not sung like that for a long time.

At breakfast, as she sat opposite to him, she seemed a new creature. It was as if

some weight that had long oppressed her had been removed from her mind.

It was not until noon that the Dutch police inspector from Koepang came to view the body of Tibu and hear the story of the durian fruit. He explained that he had been delayed at Van Heyut's plantation.

The Dutchman had been found lying on the floor of his bedroom, stabbed to the heart, that morning. The character that the Dutch policeman gave the dead man was largely unprintable.

"He was a carrion wasp. They get stung sometimes, themselves. It was some woman, no doubt. Always, with that dog, it was women. Well, the customs officials could never get him, nor could the opium laws. But sudden death comes to all two-legged pigs like that."

Murray, when the other man had departed in his motor launch, came back slowly to the house, full of his thoughts. He went to the shelf in the bedroom, which he had not thought of examining that morning. The knife was there!

He took it down and examined it carefully. The long, narrow, cruel blade looked bright, as if only recently cleaned.

As he put it back, the everyday sounds of the house came to him—Chaya grinding something in a pestle and mortar for one of her eternal curries, Kiku beating a mat.

And, now and then, there came a snatch of song from Karan as she worked. It was a music as sweet as the call of the bell bird in the Casuarinas.

THE ROAMER

My love was a roamer, the wind was his brother,
My love was a nomad, his roof the blue sky;
I listed his wooing, I cared for no other,
His song in my heart found a joyous reply:

"I'll follow the swallow o'er prairie and mountain,
I'll follow the swallow from sea unto sea,
I'll follow the swallow by river and fountain,
I'll follow the swallow if you'll follow me."

My love is a roamer, new scenes each to-morrow,
My love has no rooftree, no country his own;
My love is the joy of my life and its sorrow,
For never a hearthstone's content have I known:

A nest has the swallow upon the high mountain,
A nest has the swallow in sound of the sea;
A nest has the swallow safe hid by the fountain,
A nest has the swallow, but no home have we.

L. Mitchell Thornton

The Outside Windows

THE ARCHITECT WHO DESIGNED THIS HOMESTEAD NEVER
DREAMED OF THE DREADFUL USE TO WHICH AN
INNOCENT VACANT SPACE WOULD BE PUT

By M. L. B. Korsmeyer

FANNY CLYDE, standing upon the porch of the old farmhouse, an eager, winsome child clinging to each hand, fought a panicky impulse to run away. The place looked so much worse than on that bright bare day in March when she had driven past and decided that it would do.

To-day the pale sunshine barely penetrated the dense foliage of great trees overhanging the house; the bleak wind rattled the shutters sagging on their hinges. Only the vivid green of the fields affirmed that it was June.

She looked across the ragged lawn to the bay, which was rolling little white-capped waves to its very edge, and across the water to a narrow wooded island from which peeped the red tile chimney-caps of a secluded stone building. Peaceful it certainly was, not a living creature in evidence except bright-eyed squirrels and a sulky-looking cow—but friendly, no!

The front door suddenly opened wide, creaking like the laugh of an old, old man. And there stood Mrs. Kinney, embodying the fourth generation of women of that name who had done their duty in that house; little, lively, middle-aged, shrewd, and smiling.

"Come right in, Mrs. Clyde! I've been looking for you. Got the rooms all ready. I'm real glad to see the children. Isn't it discouraging weather? But cold in June means good and hot in July. Next month you'll be glad you're here, though it does seem chilly and sort of lonesome to-day. Pa! Come and get Mrs. Clyde's luggage in, will you?"

Mr. Kinney emerged with the bland smile which never left his countenance, and the round hat which seldom left his head.

The children smiled back at him. He gave them each a pat as he passed, silently, ambling toward the little car which had brought them.

"Mr. Kinney can run your car into the barn after he gets your things out. I've got supper all ready for you. I expect the young ones are hungry after that long drive. It's seventy miles by the Long Island Railroad, though maybe it's a little shorter driving."

"Yes, we're all hungry," Fanny replied. "Tell me, are all the houses still closed? Are you the only people who live here through the winters? Isn't it terribly lonely?"

"Land, no! There's enough of us old settlers to get together. And the roads have been pretty clear this year. But most of the places you see along the shore have been bought by city people for summer homes. They don't come out much before the first of July, 'specially when the season's late like this year. Remember, I told you the first week in June was pretty early to come? Usually I don't open up the house until later than this. Pa and I just live in the kitchen and our bedroom off it all winter."

As she spoke, she jerked her head to one side and the other like an anxious bird. "But you'll see it liven up by the Fourth. That's a great day."

"I'm not anxious to have it lively," Fanny said. "Only passing one house after another on your road with all the shutters up—"

"You can't tell by the shutters, either. Right next place to me, south, that white house—Mrs. Cook, that's Captain Cook's widow, has lived there going on fifty years. She always keeps the shutters hooked ex-

cept at the kitchen windows; only throws 'em back at house-cleaning time."

Fanny gasped. "Mercy! How dismal! Why in the world doesn't she let the sunshine in?"

"Well, I guess she don't like to fade her carpets. She gets all the light she wants through the slats. Her son came home last fall to live with her, after knocking round the world for twenty years. You might think he'd like to brighten things up. But he's a middle-aged man himself, and quiet like her. Just looks after the place and the cow, and goes fishing. He has a fine boat."

"Who lives on the island? That must be a big house with so many chimneys. Closed up, too?"

"Why, that's the Mandible place!" Mrs. Kinney replied, a bit excitedly. "No, it's never closed. There's caretakers."

Her voice dropped sympathetically. "Mrs. Mandible's never left the house, they say, since their little boy was stolen. You must have read about that in the papers last fall! She sits at a window, or on a balcony, with spyglasses. He was stolen right off the beach in front of the house, and she thinks he'll be brought back by water, if ever. Poor thing! Some think rum-runners got him for revenge. Mr. Mandible found some of them using his dock, and there was a lot of trouble. Some say the child is being held for ransom. But he might just have drowned, and the nurse invented the story of the rowboat."

"Oh, I remember!" Fanny clasped the hands of her own children tightly. A perception that she had something to be thankful for came to her for the first time in weeks.

It brought vivid light into her troubled gray eyes, warmed her cheeks with color, and lifted the corners of her mouth, lately drooping. "So that's the Mandible mansion I've heard of! Poor woman!"

By this time the girl and the boy were squirming with impatience. "Mother, please, aren't we going in? Can't we have our supper? When can we go swimming? Are you going to let us run wild to-day? Didn't you say you would let us run wild?"

Their mother smiled, withdrawing her gaze from the island. They all followed Mrs. Kinney in.

II

THE children having been fed, and persuaded into bed with assurances of riotous

liberty on the morrow, Fanny Clyde softly closed the door between the two rooms, drew a long breath, and proceeded to consider several things.

Number one: They were settled for the summer inexpensively. From now on cost must be their touchstone.

Number two: After winding up her husband's involved estate, there was enough money left for the existence of the family economically for less than one year.

Number three: After a few weeks in which to pull herself together, she *must* begin to earn money to get back their home. It was rented at present for a little more than enough to cover mortgage payments and taxes.

"I wonder if we could turn this place into a real summer resort?" was her sudden thought. "If I put my thousand dollars into making the place attractive in little ways, and we could get Mr. Kinney at work with a paintbrush? He looks awfully lazy! And if Mrs. Kinney would take me into partnership? I'll trot out and look the place over before dark."

In fifteen minutes she had a good idea of the house. It had many bedrooms, and a huge attic which could be converted into several more. An odd thing she noticed was that, while both wings of the building appeared to be of equal height, one had three rows of windows and the other four, the extra windows being small, perhaps two feet square, and side by side, between the second floor and the attic.

Could those little windows be on a stair landing, or in some place where one could construct a cunning alcove? They were on the north wall of the wing in which she had two front rooms on the second floor. It was growing dusk. She would go in now. Incidentally, she would locate the windows from inside.

She went up the stairs from first floor to attic. She entered the two north bedrooms, accounting for every foot of that wall, and she could not find the windows. Greatly puzzled, she went outdoors again. Most certainly, there were the windows, in plain view.

"That's the queerest thing I ever saw!" she said to herself. "I'm certainly not imagining those windows. Well, I'll ask Mrs. Kinney."

At that moment her ears were assailed by the rattling of a motor car, starting with difficulty. She walked back to the veranda

just in time to see Mr. and Mrs. Kinney jerkily disappearing in their old Ford car.

Her surmise that they were off to visit some one of the scarce old settlers, was followed by dismay. She would be alone in the house—night coming on, in that forlorn rambling structure—with two helpless children!

The lights might go out—the place might take fire—they hadn't learned their way about the halls and stairs—she did not even know where the telephone was!

It was a thousand feet to the next house north, and that was deserted! The distance was nearly as far to the house on the south, inhabited by an old woman who lived in the twilight.

Nothing but fields and woodland behind; a half mile of glimmering water before. How outrageous for the Kinneys to go off, leaving her like that on the very first evening!

Almost ready to cry, she gazed over the expanse of water to the dark island beyond. There her eyes found lights in the darkness, small glowing rectangles in the Mandible house, shining through the trees, and the harbor light flashing with reassuring regularity.

"Of course, it is perfectly safe," she told herself. "The very fact that they would go off and leave the place wide open shows how safe it is."

Nevertheless, she went hastily into the house and upstairs. To her intense annoyance, she found that the door to her room was provided with a little trip-latch, but no lock. And the door was so warped and shrunken that the hold of the latch was feeble indeed.

"This is a further proof of safety," she remarked to the air. "But I'm not able to appreciate it." So she dragged, shoved, and pulled at a heavy old bureau until it stood against the door.

By this time the children were asleep. Examination of their door showed a lock, but no key. The easiest thing to move in that room was the bed itself. Without waking the sleepers, she managed to roll it until that door, too, was fortified. Satisfied, then, she went to bed.

She lay in the restful early darkness. Through the open windows she could hear the leaves of the trees rustling conversationally, the occasional cry of a gull, the water lapping endlessly at the boathouse.

She was drifting off to the monotonous

lap-lap-lap, when it merged into a *flap-flap* coming nearer. Definite soft footsteps aroused her.

She turned to the edge of her bed whence she could look into the children's room; one of them might have got up. She saw both little heads on their pillows.

Now she sat up, alert. The footsteps were coming up the carpeted stairs.

III

A HAND tried her doorknob. She heard the click—and her every muscle went tight, every nerve became tense. The door was tried again, forcefully, without fumbling.

"Who is there?" she called sharply. "What do you want at my door?"

There was silence, as of surprise, then an answering demand in a rough, masculine voice:

"What are you doing in this room?"

Her heart began to beat rapidly. "Thank God, I'm barricaded," was her thought. In a guarded voice she replied: "I have rented this room for the season, taking possession to-day. Please go away."

"The Kinneys never take people in as early as this," said the voice, adding with sinister emphasis: "You can't fool me. I don't know who you are, but you'll have to get out of that room."

"Nonsense!" she retorted sharply. "Go and ask Mrs. Kinney. Don't bother me any more. I'm going to sleep."

At the same moment, sliding noiselessly to her feet, she began speedily to draw on her clothes. She was thoroughly frightened now, for whoever was outside had begun resolute pressure against the door.

He had already broken the slight hold of the latch. The door gave—half an inch. She caught her lip between her teeth. Cold waves ran over her scalp. She worked frantically with stockings and shoes.

If her barricade began to give, she would have a few seconds of retreat in the next room. She would let the children down in blankets to the roof of the veranda, slide after them, and run—run to the boathouse—there was a boat—she had seen it—and make for Mandible Island.

Any woman who had had her own child stolen would help a woman whose children were in danger!

The old bureau so far stood guard. The door gave no further. She pulled and hauled the bed until it reinforced the bureau. There was a momentary pause in

the hall, as if the intruder took heed of what she was about.

"Lady," said the voice, rather wheedling, "I don't want to do you no harm. I don't know what you're doing on these premises, and the Kinneys being out—as you know—I can't inquire. There's something in this room that belongs to me. If Kinney was home, he'd give it to me. But I can't wait for him to come back. I've got to have it now. Nobody will touch you nor anything that belongs to you. It won't take two minutes for me to get what belongs to me if you'll let me in."

Fanny wavered. "Describe your article. I'll find it and drop it out of the window to you."

The answer was a sudden unsuccessful assault upon the door of the next room. She ran in there.

"Go away! You will wake my children."

A short laugh was the response to that. "Lady, I mean business. We're going to get what we've come for, if we have to burn the house down to do it. Will you open the door, or do we shoot through it, or get an ax, or what?"

"We!" Was there more than one, then?

"Go away!" she repeated, her mouth so dry that she could scarcely form the words.

Apparently, he followed her injunction. She waited with straining ears, and the silence was more disquieting than any argument.

She was dressed, now, her small bag of valuables in hand. Must she wake the children? In the dark, she tiptoed into their room.

She went to the window and looked out cautiously. The tin roof of the veranda beneath sloped, but she believed they could keep their footing if only the children could be thoroughly awakened. If they were fretful and sleepy— She shivered.

They could run through the shadows to the boathouse. There was the boat. Good Heavens! There were two boats! Only one, she was positive, had been tied there. And a little distance beyond, a larger craft was anchored. Surely that was not out there before.

Until this moment she had not doubted her ability to outwit the unwelcome caller. Involuntarily her hand went to her heart. The man—perhaps the men—had come by water. Escape that way was cut off.

Desperately she faced inward. She might barricade the door between the rooms, let the intruder into one, and try to run for it from the other. If she and the children could reach the kitchen, they might be able to lock themselves in there.

Well, then, which room? Was there any choice? Swiftly she compared points, observing for the first time on the ceiling of her room a white wooden framework perhaps two by three feet, suggesting an opening into a storage space. That offered nothing. She decided upon the children's room as having shorter approach to the head of the stairs.

A slight scraping sound from without brought her startled attention to the window again. The points of a ladder appeared above the veranda roof. So they were coming in by a window!

Desperately calm, she knew she and the children must risk the door. But the points of the ladder did not rest. They were carried past her windows. She heard the ladder being dragged against the north wall.

IV

THEN came a sound as welcome as the strains of bagpipes ever were to beleaguered Scots—the clanking and wheezing of a rusty car. The Kinneys had come home.

As the Ford ran up to the door, she leaned from the window at a perilous angle and put all her lung power into a series of screeches. Mr. Kinney jammed on the brakes. Mrs. Kinney leaped from the car, screaming: "What is the matter? Mrs. Clyde, is that you?"

"Robbers! Burglars! Thieves!" she shouted. "They tried to get into my room. They've got a ladder up the north side of the house. Send for the State troopers!"

Mrs. Kinney heard her, too dumfounded to move. Mr. Kinney, by this time out of the car, moved without much speed toward the north. He stood there, the side of his house in full view so far as night would permit, and then he calmly thrust his hands into his pockets.

"No ladder there!" he announced.

There was in his manner a hint of unbelief exasperating to his guest.

"If you do not telephone for the troopers," she called out, "come up to this room to stand guard over my children, and I will. I tell you there is a man around this place for some bad purpose. He tried to break down my doors— Nice doors you

have, without a lock on either one of them! And I saw a ladder being carried past my windows. I heard it being put up against the north wall, just as you were coming into the yard. I believe they came by water. There was only one boat tied to your dock when I came upstairs."

Both the Kinneys turned quickly, surprisingly quickly for pa. Mrs. Kinney turned back first. "That's Salmon Cook's launch," she said, quietly. "He often ties up at our dock when the tide's low. I 'spect you've had quite a scare, on account of the lonesomeness an' all. I'm real sorry."

"That doesn't explain trying to break into my room and threatening to shoot or get an ax," Fanny declared, obstinately. "Mr. Kinney, will you send for the troopers?"

"Sure, I will," he consented agreeably. "Whoever it was would get away by the time they get here, though. S'pose I just walk over to the fence and call Salmon Cook. He'll hear me, and we'll take a look round the place. He's got a police dog that 'll make trouble for tramps. You afraid to stay right here a minute, ma?"

"Me, afraid?" Mrs. Kinney rejoined. "There's nothing on my farm can scare me. Go right ahead, pa. I'll stay here for company to Mrs. Clyde."

Mr. Kinney, with leisurely steps, walked into the darkness. Presently the women, waiting, each keeping to herself her opinion of the other's mental equipment, heard him call and a voice respond. He returned shortly, and with him were a man and a dog. Without comment Salmon Cook heard the tale, wagged his head dubiously, and they went the rounds as suggested.

"No sign of nothing," Mr. Kinney reported after twenty minutes. "We went through the barn and the house and the shrubbery. Whoever was here ain't here now."

"They couldn't have got very far away in these few minutes," Fanny persisted. "They may come back. I want the State police here."

Mr. Kinney looked troubled. "Our telephone has been out of order all day. We have awful trouble with it. The company don't take much notice of our complaints. I'd better use your phone, Salmon."

"Mine's out of order, too," he replied, cheerfully. "Can't get Central hardly half the time. I think the lady better wait till

morning, and drive over to troopers' headquarters and explain things herself. Probably they'd keep watch on the place. If men was here wanting to get in that bad, I say they'll come back. To-morrow night, likely."

Mrs. Kinney sniffed. "What on earth would they be looking for here? We've got nothing. We haven't locked up in twenty years."

"Might think Mrs. Clyde has money or jewelry," Mr. Cook opined. "You folks better go to bed. I'll call the troopers if my phone's working. Most likely it ain't." He whistled to his dog.

Fanny's eyes followed him with intentness as he disappeared into the night.

Uncomfortably, the Kinneys surveyed each other and Mrs. Clyde.

"Don't know what we can do," Mrs. Kinney said. "I'll come up and sleep in your room, if you say so."

"I'm not going to bed again," Fanny announced. "I'd like to know that you could hear me, though, if I should call."

"We'll keep our door wide open," Mr. Kinney agreed with alacrity. "Ma's a light sleeper. We'll hear you, first call." And the two hurried into the house as if glad to be rid of the matter.

Fanny remained deep in thought. The indifference shown by the farmer and his wife certainly displeased her, yet she dismissed the idea of collusion between them and her sinister visitor. Salmon Cook, however, stuck for further consideration. There was a resemblance between his voice and that which had addressed her through the door. And it was his launch in the harbor.

She drew the shades, lit a candle which had been placed for emergencies in the room, improvised a screen so that its beam would not fall in the eyes of the children, still sleeping heavily, and went back to her bed, not to sleep, merely to lie back with all her clothes on.

Once it seemed to her that she heard the whimpering of a child. She looked into the other room. The little girl turned restlessly. Again she heard such a sound, and looked in. Poor things! The disturbance had not awakened them from the drugged sleep of childhood, but it had caused troubled dreams. More than once she heard light scrambling sounds above—rats or mice in the attic. Perhaps an hour later the whimpering began again.

This time she got up to wake the child from the bad dream, and to comfort it. But in the candlelight she saw both of her children sleeping peacefully. Puzzled, she went back and sat on the edge of the bed, listening.

The faint sound continued. Could it be the whine of the wind?

For a long time she indulged in troubled contemplation of the wooden framework in the ceiling. Then she contemplated no more. She was resolved to find out where it led.

V

SHE closed the door between the rooms, so that if a rat should jump down when the framework was moved, it could not attack the children. With a small chair, she released a heavy hook and pushed the center of the panel.

It slid easily to one side, resting upon the floor above, opening into dense blackness. She waited for the possible rat to leap.

Then she climbed upon the bed, lighted candle in hand, and carefully set it just beyond the edge of the opening. Very cautiously she peered in, and at first could see nothing but black.

Gradually she made out a very large, low space. The candlelight spread out over a second ceiling of boards, not more than three feet above. The odor of the place was nauseating.

"We cannot stay here," she thought. "Terribly unwholesome. Just when I thought the place to live, for awhile, was settled."

She withdrew her head for a breath of cleaner air, and looked in again. As her eyes became accustomed to the darkness, two small windows, side by side, at some distance on the north wall, became visible.

Two windows! No wonder she had not been able to find these from the stairs. Two tightly closed windows into this hole!

And suddenly she was aware of a bundle on the floor in the faint moonlight. Either the candle flickered, or her nerves were unstrung—or that bundle moved!

She stared and stared, her head swimming from that fetid air, her legs stiff with fright. Then she got up courage to ask: "Is any one there?"

From the bundle came a small, fretful voice: "Go away!"

She nearly dropped. After dipping be-

low again for air, she strained her eyes toward the bundle.

"Come over here," she said, coaxingly. "I won't hurt you."

The bundle stirred.

"Did you bring my supper?" it asked, feebly.

"Yes," she answered, softly. "Come and get it."

The bundle moved wearily, then crept toward the opening. As it came within range of the candlelight, it showed a child's face, emaciated, tear-streaked through layers of dirt, unnaturally bright eyes.

Solemnly they looked at each other. She had all she could do to keep from breaking into tears, so tragic was the expression of that child, so full of anguish—and so brave.

"I have something nice for you," she said. "You don't have to stay in this horrible place any longer. I will take you into my pleasant room. Look and see."

The child crawled close to the edge and looked down, and she gently moved the candle so that its light fell below.

"I'm afraid," it said, shrinking.

"See. There is a nice, clean bed. I will give you something to eat, and then you shall lie there and sleep."

"I like a bed," the little one said. "The floor is hard. I'm always cold. I'm hungry. He didn't bring my supper."

She put one arm around the little body, drew its skinny arms around her neck and the wasted little legs into the hole, bent down with it, and placed it on the bed. Her next action was hurriedly to close the trapdoor. Then she got down from the bed to the floor, and again the forlorn object regarded her, and she gazed back at it.

"I wish I had milk for you," she said. "In the morning we will get some. I have some fruit and little cakes which I keep for my children when they are hungry."

She put a few cherries on a plate, along with a small sponge cake, and filled a glass from the water pitcher on the washstand.

With feverish eagerness the child drained the glass, then, with one thin, trembling hand, seized a cake.

"Thank you," it said, after one ravenous bite. "What's your name? You like little boys, don't you? I'm Freddy Mandible, and I want my mother."

The blood pounded in her temples.

"I thought so," she said. "I'm your friend, Mrs. Clyde."

He finished the skimpy repast before speaking again. Then he remarked gravely: "Sam is not my friend. He only pretends. It is not a boy's friend when he takes you away from your mamma and your father. Sam said he would bring me back if I was a good boy. And I *was* a good boy. And he never did. Do you know where I live? Will you take me home? I can show you where my home is. I been looking at it all day long."

"I will," she told him, no longer keeping back the tears. "I will take you home, my dear."

VI

AFTER the dirty blanket and his filthy garments had been removed, Fanny Clyde bathed him as best she could with cold water and soap, wiping him softly, and smoothing vaseline into the poor chafed skin. She put him into flannel nightdrawers belonging to her own small son.

By the time he had fallen asleep on her bed, pathetically happy, she had learned all he was able to relate of his misfortune. He had been swimming in shallow water, proud of his newly acquired accomplishment, when a man had rowed near, called to him laughingly, and lifted him into the boat. In a few moments he was tossed up into a waiting launch—and then his home receded farther and farther.

For a long time he had lived on the launch with Sam. Then, one day the launch had tied up near shore. Again he was taken in a rowboat, imagining that he was coming home.

Sam had brought him into this strange empty house, put him up through the hole in the ceiling, and there he had stayed for he did not know how long. In the evening Sam would bring him food—hot-dog sandwiches, he said—and water. At first he had cried all the time, but of late he had not cried any more.

All night Fanny sat at the window, so that any one watching could not fail to observe she was on guard. With the first rays of dawn she awakened all the children. The astonishment of her own at beholding the new addition to the family was ludicrous.

"But I thought, when you had a new baby, it was always a baby!" her son exclaimed.

"But this is Freddy," Fanny explained. "He is not really, truly ours. He is

with us only till we can take him to his own mother. And you are going to help. It's a secret. We must hide him, and dress him in sister's clothes, like a little girl."

Bit by bit she unfolded her plan, and the children eagerly entered into the game.

With the three dressed and secure in one room, she opened the door of the other to reconnoiter. The hall was clear. On tip-toes, they found the way to the kitchen. She hid them all in the pantry, to the delight of her own children and the palpable distress of Freddy Mandible, who scented imprisonment again.

"Don't make one sound!" she cautioned them, reflecting that ma was not so light a sleeper as had been described. "If Freddy will be brave, and you help him, we can take him home right now. I must run to the barn and get our car. Remember, don't come out, don't answer, no matter who calls you. Wait for me!"

"I won't cry," Freddy assured her.

She got the car out with no interruption. However, as she was driving toward the back door, she saw Salmon Cook calmly leaning over the fence.

"Up early, aren't you?" she called to him sharply.

"I'm always up early," was his easy reply. "Nothing else happened to scare you, did it? Not running away?"

"Not at all," she answered clearly. "I'll be back for breakfast. But I can't wait to get to the State troopers—following your advice!"

She saw him grin, and knew he was narrowly watching. She stopped the car at the kitchen door, and placed it to obscure his view as much as possible.

When she unlocked the pantry door, to the intense relief of Freddy, and the satisfaction of the others, she explained the next part of the game. Son and daughter were to run to the car, and then run back, as if they had forgotten something. Then son and Freddy were to run to the car and jump in, and Freddy hide on the floor, and son run back again once or twice, and then son and daughter run and climb in together in conclusion.

In this confusion, and with Freddy appearing as a girl, she hoped to cover the fact that there were three. If it did not work, and Salmon attempted to stop her—Well, she would simply do her best to drive into him, knock him down, and run over him.

But the plan worked perfectly, the children acting their parts with enthusiasm. She sped from the farm, into the highroad, and did not stop to inquire the way to police headquarters until she had put five miles behind her.

When finally she drove into the yard of the big, old frame house used by the troopers, she had a glimpse through the front window of fresh-faced, uniformed men, drawn up around a breakfast table presided over by a motherly looking housekeeper, who just then was serving coffee.

"Ruth," Mrs. Clyde commanded her daughter, who was six, and responsible, "go to the door, knock hard, then walk right in and ask one of those men to come out to mother."

Ruth did her bidding eagerly, and promptly came out with an inquiring officer.

Fanny opened the door of the car, laid her hand upon his broad shoulder, and sank back limply.

"Look in the back seat," she said weakly. "I've got the Mandible child."

"What's that you say?" cried the officer, immediately ducking into the car. "Freddy Mandible? This little skinny one? I don't know as I'd recognize him from the picture. Are you sure?"

And he stared as though the news were good beyond belief. "Say, do you know

there's a fifty thousand dollars reward for the return of this boy, alive?"

Fanny's head swam. "I didn't know it was as big as that!" She could see her children back in their own home, once again secure. She remembered the lighted windows of the Mandible mansion inexplicably comforting her. "They were shining for me," she thought. "They were."

To the officer she said: "You and the boys at this post ought to get another reward if you bring in the kidnaper—Salmon Cook! I can show you where he is. But there's a woman waiting on Mandible Island. How do we get there?"

"You're a good scout," said the trooper. "There's a bridge. Let's go."

Salmon Cook, the moment Fanny's car had disappeared from his view, darted into the Kinney house and up to the room with the trapdoor. When he found his little victim gone, he lost no time.

As unceremoniously as he had returned after twenty years of wandering, he made ready to go. In his little launch, he was heading for the open sound—and then, perhaps, to sea—but the course lay past the point of Mandible Island, and there the Mandible steam yacht was waiting for him, troopers aboard.

He will not be home in another twenty years.

C A N D L E S

GRAY mist across the sea at dawn,
Gray cobwebs on the land,
Gray gulls against the sky that morn
When first you clasped my hand.

When you saw beauty in my face
It almost was high noon—
We'd spent long, dreamy, laughing hours
Beside a bleak lagoon.

The room was warm with candlelight
And perfumed with black tea—
An ivory Buddha listened when
You first said you loved me.

My quaint dear things all held their breath
When, stroking my dark head,
You gently kissed me on the mouth
And whimsically said:

"Blue candles for the window case—
Orange candles for the stairs—
White candles bring you all my love—
Green candles for your prayers."

Rene Guion

Custard's Last Fight

MARTHA'S TWO SUITORS WERE SO ATTRACTIVE THAT SHE COULDN'T DECIDE, SO SHE PUT THEM THROUGH THEIR PACES—AND NEARLY WRECKED THE RANCH

By Myron Brinig

THEY called it the Big E Ranch. Martha Emmett inherited the rolling acres this side of the Corn Cob River from her husband, Cal Emmett.

There wasn't a finer fellow in Montana than big, bluff Cal. Everybody swore by him, and that's saying a good deal in a ranching country, where your employees usually swear, but not by you.

Cal was happiest when he was eating, and Martha was most content when she was cooking. That made them an ideally matched couple. Before her marriage, Martha was chief consulting cook to one of the more select hotels in Butte, and she prepared dishes that would have caused the mouth of a lizard to water.

All the big guns who ever stayed at that particular hostelry, from President Roosevelt down, fell in love with Martha's dishes. But Cal Emmett went them all one better. He fell in love with Martha, herself, and brought her out to the Big E as his wife and cook.

Well, after that, nearly everybody west of the Statue of Liberty tried to get invited to the Emmett Ranch, just to taste those epicurean victuals. And nearly everybody of any account was invited, including the Senate, the House of Representatives, great novelists, and stage and screen celebrities.

They all came away praising Martha Emmett—not only her cooking, but her eyes. She had the sort of eyes that drive a man to poetry and—er—lemonade. Her eyes were blue, but with a difference.

There are blue eyes and blue eyes, but hers were the blues that made you think of the Mediterranean, Montana sapphires, the blue grotto of Capri, the sky in Yel-

lowstone Park and thereabouts, and a Maxfield Parrish setting.

"The Lady of the Eyes and Pies," they called Martha. It was extremely difficult to say which were the more beautiful. Both were the *dernier cri*, as they say in Montparnasse, in orbs and pastries.

When Cal Emmett was killed in a railway accident, we all felt mighty sorry for his widow. We remembered how much they had loved one another, what tremendous pals they had been. And their having been married only three years made it all the more tragic.

Martha Emmett refused to leave the ranch after her husband's death, she'd grown so fond of it. She and Cal had been partners in everything.

Mrs. Emmett was perfectly capable of carrying on in her husband's place; so, instead of crying those big, blue eyes out until they were faded, Martha bravely faced the world with a smile, like the thoroughbred that she was.

She rode to round-up with the boys, supervised the shipments of cattle to Omaha, and was a conspicuous figure on the plains, riding her Indian pony, Charlot. The boys worshiped her as a man will adore a goddess, a figure of legend.

A look out of those eyes, plus a big chunk of custard pie, and you were Martha Emmett's slave for several lifetimes.

It got so pleasant around the place that the Big E became known as the Big Eats. The most envied men in Flathead County were those employed on the Big Eats, and there was a long waiting list trying to join on in any capacity.

Lean, dyspeptic ranch hands from the Canadian border to the Texas Panhandle

looked forward to the day when they would work for Martha Emmett. She was constantly receiving letters written in this vein:

DERE MA'AM:

It has kum to mi attenshun that yu are lookin' fur a hand on yore Big Eats Ranch. Fur a long time now I bin bothered terrubel by stummik-trubble doo to bad fude, and my Doc tells me thar is ownly wan cure an' thet's workin' fur yu, Ma'am.

I reckon yu wudn't want me to die, Ma'am, but I xpect to cash in my checks enny day now unles I gits a change of dite.

Now thar's dite an' dite, but thar's ownly wan Martha Emmett which leeds me to take pen in hand, coz she knos how to feed a man proper. Don't be a-scared, Ma'am; I won't eat you pore as I'm a small eater, an' a hell of a hard wurker.

It's akkout my stummik as I sed before, Ma'am, thet I need a change of dite an' I sure hope yu are the same frum the vury bottum of my heart.

After three years of widowhood, it became noticeable that Martha Emmett was being courted by two men. One of them, Don Donohue, her handsome foreman, was a black-haired Irishman, with a weakness for custard pie and the poems of Yeats.

Don had been foreman on the Big Eats when Cal was alive, and he stayed on after his employer's death to help the widow run things. He was an excellent foreman, and it was due to his fine executive ability that the Big Eats showed a tidy profit at the end of every year.

Besides being a lover of poetry and pie, Don was a marvelous rider, and owned several letters from the big movie companies out in Hollywood. They were willing to double his salary if he'd only come out and do stunts for them *à la* Fred Thomson and Jack Holt.

If Don had gone into the pictures, there's little doubt that he would have given some of those marcel waves in California a run for their money. But with Martha Emmett as his boss, the celluloid celebrities had very little attraction for the Irishman. He much preferred playing leads to Martha than kissing the most flaming of the youthful flappers in Hollywood.

And of course he couldn't think of deserting that wonderful custard pie.

The other man in the, so to speak, pie angle was Jud Carpenter, who owned the Rolling C, and was, in a manner of saying, Martha's next-door neighbor. That meant, of course, that he and Martha lived some ten miles apart, but, in this day of swift locomotion, what's ten miles?

Nearly every evening, Jud rolled around in his beautifully polished sedan, that looked as though it had just turned the corner of Park Avenue and Forty-Fifth Street. For the benefit of those who don't know, we'll explain that Park Avenue is a street in New York where the Guggenbilts speak only to the Morganheims and the Morganheims speak only to their personal bootlegger.

Don didn't own a beautifully polished sedan, but he had a white horse called Snowbird that he wouldn't have traded for the whole of Detroit, including the Tiger baseball team. It was a question of taking the air in the sedan or on Snowbird, and Martha had a difficult time making a choice.

When Jud took Martha out in the car, Don consoled himself by reading poems of unrequited love. What happened inside the sedan, no one but Martha and Jud knew, and they never told.

But when Jud's gas-buggy wasn't parked in front of the ranch house, it was Don's turn, and he and Martha would ride off on their magnificent horses. They chose the dim, lovely trails that wound in and out of the Flathead foothills, and what happened during these outings, no one ever knew, and Martha and Don never told. Which is fair enough.

The boys in the bunk house were as excited as if they were courting Martha along with Don and Jud. There were two opposing contingents, one of which favored the foreman, and the other Jud.

"D'ya think he ever, now, kisses her when he takes her out in that rubber-tired palace from Dee-troit?" Sparky Adams asked Pink Pill Pinkham.

"What d'ya mean, kiss?" asked Pink Pill, looking a shade pinker than usual. "The boss ain't no chorus girl to allow any *hombre* to press his suit on her ruby lips.

"Jus' the same, I'm willin' to bet yu thet Jud Carpenter's goin' to be our next boss," Pink Pill went on. "He's got the coin an' a ranch. Yu put the Big Eats an' th' Rolling C together, an' what have yu? Half o' this yere God's country!"

"I'm thinkin'—" began Piccolo Pete.

"Don't overstrain yo'self," interrupted Pink Pill.

"Jus' the same," went on Piccolo, scowling a deep scowl, "I'm thinkin' that Don's goin' to win the best hand at bakin' pies

this treasure State has ever knowed. It's mighty hard to beat an Irishman when it comes to makin' love an' singin' tenor. Look at Jawn McCormack. Look at this yere Don Jew-awn."

"Don Jew-awn was a Greaser, yu pore stovepipe," Sparky Adams sharply corrected Piccolo.

"Wall, I'll tell yu what I'll do," Pink Pill spoke up, heatedly. "I'll lay odds a hundred to one thet Jud walks off with the bride an' all the trimmin's."

"G'wan," said Sparky, contemptuously. "Yu was the guy that bet Jack Dempsey would lick this yere lit'rary heavyweight, Gene Tunney."

"Jus' th' same, I'll stick to whut I'm sayin'," persisted Pink Pill. "Is it a bet? A hundred to one Jud leads her to the altar while the organ plays 'Nearer My Gawd to Thee.'"

"Wall, thet's certainly what I call the gamblin' sperit," remarked Sparky. "Sure, it's a bet. Only don't say I didn't warn yu to lay off."

"Bettin' on a love affair is as risky a business as crossin' the English Channel. Yu never know when yore Australian crawl is goin' to git all tangled up." Having delivered himself of this bit of timely philosophy, Sparky pursed his lips reflectively, and sat back in his chair.

II

Now, if the truth be told—and the truth must always be told, soon or late—Martha Emmett was just the least bit bewildered. She liked Jud Carpenter well enough, but it didn't seem to her, at the moment, that she liked him better than Don Donohue.

Both men appealed strongly to her; both were handsome, sincere, and manly. It would be nice to marry before Christmas, what with its being so nice to have a man around to dress up like Santa Claus.

It would be pleasing to sit down to Christmas dinner with a husband opposite to pass you things, and praise your culinary art. It would be more than pleasant to smell tobacco in the house again.

Jud smoked rich, black cigars, and Don—as became a lover of poetry—drew on a pipe. Jud used bay rum after shaving, and he smelled thrillingly when he leaned close. And Don used some kind of polish on his hair that looked like shoeblackening, but smelled like lily of the valley.

As she combed her long hair before the

mirror one night in late autumn—she had left her hair unbobbed, because combing it always stimulated her mind—Martha was thinking that there ought to be some way she could prove to herself which man she loved best.

There were the usual schemes clever ladies put to use. She might go to them and confess that she had lost all her money, or she might confess that she had lost her recipe for baking custard pie. She might admit that her years were thirty instead of twenty-six. She might even ask them to give up tobacco, or one thing or another.

All were tests to prove their love, and all had been used by puzzled ladies from the days of Eve to the eve of days. And yet, did any of these tests prove anything, wondered Martha, her mind active under the stimulation of the comb? A man might answer every test and still be found wanting, she concluded, as she slipped into bed.

Martha's last waking thought was of the pie she had baked that very day. She had given a large portion to Don, and an equally generous piece to Jud. Both suitors had smacked their lips and rolled their eyes. Both had been overcome by emotion—the deep, sincere emotion that only delicious pie can call forth from a man's breast.

Martha dreamed she was in the kitchen baking pies—apple, cherry, rhubarb, prune, lemon, pineapple, and apricot pies; pies by the tens, twenties, and thirties; pies that bring a gulp to your throat, an exalted light to your eyes; gorgeous pies, with crusts as crisp and feathery as only the magic of a master hand can create them; delicious, exquisite, voluptuous pies; Rembrandts, Murillos, Leonardo da Vincis of pies.

And the moment each pie was baked, Martha removed it from the oven and placed it in a dish. Two men were in the kitchen murmuring ecstatically at the emergence of each pie. One of these ecstatic onlookers was Jud Carpenter, the other, Don Donohue.

They took turns at eating the pies. First, Jud would swallow a whole pie, then Don would swallow one. It seemed as though Martha would never be done baking, and Jud and Don swallowing. It was the most extraordinary sight since Custer's last fight.

Somehow, the phrase, Custer's Last Fight, got all mixed up with the pies, and Martha heard herself calling: "Custard's

Last Fight! Custard's Last Fight!" over and over again.

But neither Jud nor Don paid the least attention to Martha's cries. They were too busy eating great, crisp circles of pies—cherry, chocolate, strawberry, huckleberry, blueberry, gooseberry, custard pies.

They didn't bother to cut the pies into respectable quarters, or even halves. Hardly. They would lift a pie into their hands, and, *presto!* it had disappeared into the dark corners of their mouths. They were like magicians who vie with one another for the applause of a beautiful audience—in this case, Martha.

Still dreaming, it occurred to Martha that they were having a contest with one another. The man who succeeded in downing the greatest number of pies would be the fortunate bridegroom.

Quite unexpectedly, the dream jumped its track—a habit of dreams—and Martha was marching up the church aisle, leaning on—but on whose arm, exactly?

She looked up to see, but where the face should have been was only a vast blob of pie. "Take off that pie! I know you!" Martha cried in great excitement; but the bridegroom refused to do so.

He insisted on wearing it throughout the ceremony, while the organist pressed juicy chords out of an organ made of soft, white dough. Martha was annoyed that the organ had not been left longer in the oven. It took her several minutes to recall that she was being married.

"But I don't want to marry a pie!" she sobbed in her sleep. "I don't want to. Please, Mr. Minister, I'm marrying a pie; and I'll be sick if you don't let me go!" But the minister went on marrying her just the same, paying not the least attention to her sobs of protest. And when it seemed as though the whole world had become nothing but a great pie, Martha awakened to find the sunlight, like an arrow of gold, shooting at her eyes through the window.

For some minutes, Martha lay back on her pillow, thinking about her strange dream. And then she began to sing, and jumped out of bed to do a barefooted Charleston. She had hit upon a way of choosing a husband.

III

FOR a whole week, following that dream, Martha Emmett was busy in the kitchen

of the ranch house. Pink Pill Pinkham and Sparky Adams spent their time carrying in bushels of apples, a crate of peaches, buckets of gooseberries, and various other pie ingredients.

Martha thanked them very prettily. Her nose was shiny, but she didn't mind that so much. It was a sacrifice in a good cause.

"By all the pestiferous crows in the co'nfield," swore Pink Pill, "our boss is up to somethin' devilish. I ain't been doin' nuthin' fur a hull week but haulin' fruit into that there kitchen. What's she goin' to do, anyways—invite the complete American Legion to Sunday dinner?"

"Naw, yu pore sliver, she's invitin' only two," replied Sparky. "I'll give yu one guess as to whomsoever them two is."

"Not Jud an' Don?" asked Pink Pill.

"The vury same. No wonder yu're gettin' bald. Yore brains is crowdin' all the hair off'n yore dome."

"Seems like she's makin' a lot o' food fur two mere men," muttered Pink Pill. "A man's only got one stummick, an' thar's times when one's a half dozen too many."

"Yu don't know the ca-pacities of these two pertic'lar stummicks," said Sparky. "Did yu ever see Jud Carpenter eat? A beefsteak is no more 'n a life saver to him, an' as fur pies, he's only got to look at 'em an' they disappear."

"How about Don?" asked Pink Pill.

"What's his, now, record?"

"I seen him eat a hull steer at that thar barbecue the Mannings give last year. An' the steer was smothered with a carload of onions. Boy, that *hombre* has more teeth than the Volstead Act."

"Yu mean to say," Pink Pill asked, "that this yere boss o' ourn is goin' to feed 'em pies till they get blue in th' face? Gosh, Sparky, I don't see how a 'uman bein' kin eat more'n three pies at a sittin' an' still live to count the crumbs that's left. He'd git pie-eyed."

"Wall," philosophized Sparky, "pies is pies, an' the one who eats the most of 'em without doin' a flop, is goin' to be the next boss o' the Big Eats, an' all the chattels pertainin' thereto."

"Naw," drawled Pink Pill, yawning prodigiously. "Yu're trying to load me up with bunk, yu fifty-fifth son of a fifty-fifth son of a Mormon."

"Hawnest tu hawnest, I'm utterin' gos-

pel truth," swore Sparky, very much in earnest. "The lady, she likes 'em both, but she kin only marry one, accordin' to the Rev. Hoyle; so she's goin' to pick the one who kin eat the most without enlargin' to Zeppelin size."

"Wall, I'll be—I'll be—" gasped Pink Pill, spinning around on his pivots to walk the other way.

"'N other words," said Sparky, "yu cain't eat yore cake an' have it, too; but ef yu eats yore pie, ol' son, yu're through!"

IV

HAVING baked ten pies a day, of all denominations, including the sweet potato, Martha found that she had seventy pies in readiness for Sunday dinner. She could not but be proud of her feat; certainly no culinary artist outside of a hotel or restaurant had ever contrived so much pastry, of so superior a quality, in such a short space of time.

But the pies were not all. Martha had also created a dinner. It was such a dinner as she, alone of all women, could create, off at the barrier with golden noodle soup, and running down the home stretch with varieties of nuts. The stairs leading up to the judgment seat, speaking metaphorically, were made of pie.

Promptly at two, Don arrived in the kitchen, his black hair plastered down on his well-shaped head so that it shone and shimmered like the helmet of Ulysses before Troy. A few minutes later Jud appeared, dressed for a killing and a feeding.

He gave off a very agreeable odor of bay rum. His clothes were worthy of a Bond Street tailor, and his manner was as sleek and winning as that of a tango instructor in Madrid. We mean Madrid, Spain, and not Madrid, Montana.

The legend that ranchmen array themselves only in chaps or overalls is thus forever K.O'd. They can hold their own with the Prince of Wales.

Upon entering the kitchen, Jud sniffed, and assumed a beatific expression as if he smelled Paradise. "Gosh-um-golly, that food smells good to these nostrils," he told Martha. "An' I'm hungry enough to eat the extra board in the table."

"I'm kind of voracious, myself," put in Don, but a worried wrinkle made its appearance in his usually placid forehead. The night before, he had suffered a slight attack of indigestion, and had not slum-

bered with his accustomed depth and gusto.

"I'm so glad you boys are hungry," giggled Martha. "Both of you are going to eat and eat, and the first who cries, 'Hold, enough!' is not going to be worth two hen's teeth in this home, sweet home."

Having delivered herself of this ultimatum, Martha swung wide the portals that guarded her cupboard, and the seventy pies, like the seventy cymbals of Solomon's dancing girls, were revealed in all their brash glory.

"By the thousand narrow escapes of Houdini!" gasped Don. "What am I now perceivin'?"

"Don't be alarmed," smiled Martha. "They're only pies."

"Only seventy?" asked Jud, moving a broad-palmed hand over his capacious stomach, and emitting ecstatic yum-yums. But they were not genuinely pleasurable yum-yums. They sounded a bit hollow and fearful.

It was quite true that Jud's molars were in first-class, A No. 1 condition. It was moreover, undeniable that Jud could out-eat Babe Ruth and Señor Firpo of Argentina put together.

But who, in this wide world, had ever partaken of more than ten pies at a sitting, and lived to enjoy an after-dinner cigar?

True, Balzac was known to eat fifty lamb chops for luncheon. But Balzac was not only a genius; he was also a Frenchman. The combination has never been known to lower the napkin in times of crises.

Furthermore, there can be no doubt that Don Donohue had once partaken of a roasted steer, a very small steer, to be sure. But a steer, as any one will tell you, is meat, whereas pies are layers of rich fruit corseted in dough. "You don't mean to say," questioned Don, "that them pies are fur the three of us?"

"Two of us. Leave me out, please," laughed Martha, in her most winning way. "Oh, I may have a very small portion of a quarter of one apple pie. But no more! Fat girls went out with the bustle, you know."

"Wall, it does seem like a heap o' pie fur just Jud an' myself," ventured Don, beginning to perspire.

"Gosh-um-golly," pronounced Jud, "why don't yu speak fur yure own self, Don? Pies ain't any more 'n gumdrops

to me. I was born in Boston, an' every little corpuscle in my body is the spirit of a pie thet's passed on."

Don thrust out his chin, and steeled himself to battle. Was he going to let a big bluff like Jud Carpenter get the better of him? He'd be burned in oil if he would! If Jud could swallow pies by the dozen, why, so could he. But what was the, now, gosh-dangled sense of it all, anyway? What was Martha Emmett up to?

"You know," said Martha, rather casually, "I had the most peculiar dream one night last week. It was very strange. I dreamed that I had promised to marry the man who ate the most pies. Wasn't it silly? I had a good laugh over it the next morning, I can tell you."

"Thet sure was a funny dream," murmured Don, beginning to see a bright light. It was such a bright light that he blinked several times. In his stomach he felt that a long line of pies were crouching, ready to spring forward at the report of a pistol, and race for some glorious reward. Lithe, athletic pies, all dressed up in little running trunks. They were fearless, tense pies, full of crust.

"Say, Martha, thet sure was my lucky night when yu had thet there dream," laughed Jud.

But, as his eyes met Don's, a certain telepathic flash of sympathy quivered between the two men. It was as if they were saying to one another, "Wall, it sure looks like a duel to the death, but I'll be damned if I show the yaller streak. Give me pie, or give me death!"

And yet each man harbored a great fear that pie and death might be synonymous terms.

"Well, boys," invited Martha, "be seated, and be careful of your table manners. Play to the rules, and do yourselves proud."

"Martha," asked Don, getting very serious all of a sudden, "do yu mind if I take off this yere, now, coat o' mine? Don't yu feel sort o' warmish?"

"Take it off, if yu like, Don," agreed Martha, generously. "But, remember, it's the infighting that will win the battle."

"I guess I'll loosen my belt a noich," said Jud. "Yu don't have any objection, do y', Martha?"

"I hope you've got plenty of notches, Jud," smiled Martha, bringing in the first course, golden soup with noodles.

Don's first glimpse of the soup caused him a certain misunderstanding, so that he breathed great gobs of relief. "Why, I thought we was only goin' to eat pie," he laughed, the wrinkle disappearing from his forehead. "Why didn't yu tell me thet a slice o' pie was goin' to be dessert?"

"Not a slice," corrected Martha. "Many pies—as many pies as there are daisies in yonder meadow. Look, Don, how the brush of the sun tints them into a sea of shimmering gold!"

The wrinkle reappeared in Don's forehead, and his face became very pale. "I see," he whispered, and looked with sickly eye upon the noodles.

"Why, Don, don't you like the soup?" asked Martha, and for a moment it looked as if she were going to cry.

"It's certainly good soup," gurgled Don, while a noodle slipped down the wrong chute. "I—I d-don't know when I ever t-tasted such good s-soup. My! My! It certainly is—"

"Oh-h-h! Dee-licious!" sighed Jud, creating golden waves in the bowl. "This soup is like heaven! Martha, you ought, now, to have a medal pinned on yu fur makin' this yere soup. Um-mmmmm!"

V

MEANWHILE, a considerable gallery of spectators had collected without the arena in which the two immersed gladiators souped with one another for a lady's fair hand.

The gallery included Sparky Adams, Pink Pill Pinkham, Piccolo Pete, and a half dozen or so other hands of the Big Eats. "Glue yore eye on thet," whispered Sparky. "She's bringin' in enough fried chicken to feed a whole brigade of mule-skinners."

"Thet chicken looks like it 'd melt in an iceberg's mouth," opined Pink Pill, gulping loudly, and closing his eyes to blot out the almost unbearable picture.

"It would, if pie wasn't comin' on," snickered Piccolo. "Thar's goin' to be a couple pie-eyed corpses in thar afore yon sun has set."

"Um-mmmmm!" murmured Jud Carpenter, smacking his lips, oblivious of Piccolo's prophecy. "Thet chicken must 'a' led a charmed life. He lays mighty easy in my stummick."

"I hope he lays aigs that hatch," grumbled Don, from across the table. "I don't

wish no harm on yu, Jud, but I hope he lays a hundred aigs, an' each aig hatches triplets."

"Perhaps you boys would like another portion," offered Martha, always the hospitable hostess.

"No! No! Wouldn't think of it, but thank yu just the same!" Jud refused, stirring uneasily in his chair.

"I'll have another portion!" chimed in Don, as blithe and merry as a wedding bell, smiling sardonically across the table at his rival.

"Wall, if Don's goin' to, yu kin count me in too, Martha," interposed Jud, hastily. "Thar's no man goin' to out-chew me when it comes to Martha Emmett's food!"

"Oh, my, yes, there is!" ejaculated Don, hurling defiance out of slightly bulging eyes. "I still got my wisdom teeth, I have. I been savin' 'em for just such an occasion."

"No *hombre* ever out-ate Jud Carpenter without seein' a surgeon afterwards," growled the boss of the Rolling C, and if words were calories, Don would have been slain in that instant.

"Wall, every Napoleon has his, now, Waterloo, Jud," replied Don, attacking his second portion of chicken with great determination, "an' every tummy is bound to have its ache."

"Look at them two bozos eatin' a double portion of chicken, would yu?" mourned Sparky, his nose flat against the window-pane. "An' the funny part of it all is thet in a hour from now they'll be so unconscious they'll never remember how it tasted."

"It's just my luck to fall in love with dames what are always reducin'," whispered Pink Pill, wiping a tear off the bridge of his freckled nose. "From now on, the more they weigh, the harder I rush 'em."

"It looks from here like Don's gettin' a little pale around the gills," observed Piccolo Pete, stealing a glance through the window. "Speakin' as an ex-navy man, I'd say thar's enough ballast in his hold to give him a mighty sinkin' feelin'."

"Jud ain't lookin' none too chipper hisself," interposed Nils Hanson, the Cheyenne Rodeo wizard. "I'd rather ride Dynamite, the wildest hoss at th' rodeo, than face them thar pies."

"Hey, fellers, she's bringin' in cucumber salad!" yelled Sparky. "An' I'm here to

say thet cucumbers an' pies ain't buddies in no man's country."

After the salad, Don hoped and prayed that there would be a short intermission, so that what had gone before and what was going to follow would not get mixed up in any scandalous goin's on. Unfortunately, his hopes were in vain, for, almost immediately, Martha came in, bearing pies. Her lips were parted in a pearly smile, and her eyes danced with excitement.

Jud surveyed the pastries with a spartan-like grin, and loosened another notch in his belt. He could not help discovering, with considerable alarm, that the last notch had been reached. Well, he would have to trust to luck and the elasticity of his belt. "Cherry is my fav'rite pie," he murmured, and his eyes took on a dreamy expression, but whether from ecstasy or exhaustion, it was impossible to tell.

"I'm kind of stuck on custard, myself," growled Don, helping himself to a generous mouthful of that variety. "Oo-oo! This pie is poetry. Thet's what it is. Poetry!" "Like the 'Pied Piper,' maybe?" asked Martha, innocently.

"This yere pie is lighter 'n a feather, an' it slides down my epiglottis like a chord slides down the inside of a trombone," murmured Jud, lyrically.

"Bring on more!" cried Don, after he had finished his first pie, and experienced no unpleasant reaction. "Say, I could eat a dozen o' these things!"

"Same here!" seconded Jud. "Bring 'em on! They make the best o' impressions on me. I'm just beginnin' to get my appetite."

Martha brought in the third and fourth pies, which were pineapple, and beheld them vanish like snowflakes under the warm rays of the sun. There followed four more pies, huckleberry and prune.

"Say, I cain't stand much more o' this," gasped Sparky Adams. "It makes me suffer jus' to look at 'em. What number is this?"

"They're on thar third apiece," explained Pink Pill, scratching his red hair in awe. "Do yu happen to notice anything queer about Jud's stummick?"

"It looks swollen to me," solemnly averred Piccolo.

"It looks like he's got the mumps in the wrong place," said Nils Hanson.

There followed eight more pies, rhubarb, apple, lemon, crab apple, chocolate, apri-

cot, mince, and custard. Don was beginning to hang onto the table with a bleary-eyed expression, but he managed a brave smile when the twelfth pie appeared.

As Don continued to gaze down upon it, the pie seemed to enlarge before his eyes, like a balloon being filled with gas. He had lost all count of time. He felt that it must have been years ago when he tasted that first delicious pie.

It had been a relatively insignificant pie, that first one. It had been, as Don recalled, rather a small pie, a harmless pie, dimensionally modest, perhaps six inches in diameter, certainly not larger.

But, in the intervening years, as pie followed pie, the six inches had grown longer and longer, until now, Don felt that the full moon had been placed before him. Wouldn't it be strange, thought Don, if the moon were made of custard pie?

Nevertheless, Don opened his mouth, and shoved rich, yellow custard within, all the while keeping an eye that had grown glassy and swollen upon his rival across the table. Jud, beginning his twelfth pie, looked alarmingly fit.

Perhaps his physiognomy had grown a trifle purplish in hue, but that might be because the afternoon was growing late, and the room fading to darkness. Jud suddenly coughed. "Marvelesh!" he breathed huskily. "Thish ish bez pie I ever tash-tash-ted. 'Sh shertainly schwell pie!"

"First thing we know," said Sparky, "Congress 'll pass a law prohibitin' pie, an' we'll be smugglin' English tarts an' French pastry across this yere, now, Canadian border."

"It certainly does look as how Jud's had one custard pie too many," observed Nils Hanson.

"Say, fellers," said Piccolo, suddenly looking very pallid, "I'm afraid I'm goin' to pass out. I got a funny feelin' in the pit o' my stummick."

"I'm gettin' a little groggy myself," opined Pink Pill. "Everything's gettin' kind o' blurred afore my eyes—"

Piccolo and Pink Pill collapsed simultaneously, and lay with their toes turned upward to the sky. "Oh, look at the little birdies in th' pie," warbled Pink Pill, with a funny grin on his face.

VI

At the beginning of the now historic dinner, Martha had looked with a good deal

of amusement on the pie-eaters; but now that twenty-four of her pastries had been consumed by her adoring, dogged swains, she was inclined to doubt the wisdom of her love test.

It was becoming increasingly plain that both Don and Jud loved her madly, wildly, and that only death could make them haul up the white napkin of surrender.

After the twelfth pie, Martha decided that her test had been a failure. The result was a draw, both suitors having covered themselves with glory.

"No more, boys!" she exclaimed, on the point of tears. "You've both had enough."

"Noshun o' the sort," protested Jud, swaying perilously in his chair. "I'm jus' gettin' shar—started. Eatin' piesh ish a' zeashy as rollin' hoopsh—I mean whoops. Ain't had any peash pie yet."

"Bring 'em on, the whole seventy o' them!" persisted Don, stubbornly. "If that pie-eyed Boston bean across the table is game, so am I! We'll finish eatin' pie in hell!"

"Sh-hhh!" and Jud wagged an unsteady index finger in Don's face. "Mushn't be profane before th' fairer shex—sexsh, I mean shexsh."

"But, boys," wept Martha, helplessly, "I don't really think that either of you ought to have any more. I'm afraid—"

"More piesh! I wan' more piesh!" cried Jud, beating the table with knife and fork. "I'll show tha' Irishman across th' table whosh th' real man in this crowd!"

"Wall, I never knowed any real man who got pickled on pie!" Don taunted.

"You're lyin', Don Donohue! I'll make yu eat them wordsh!" and Jud shook an uncertain fist at the foreman.

"Pies, not words, is what I'm, now, eatin'," retorted Don.

It looked, for a time, as though the two men would come to blows, and Martha, hoping to avert physical warfare, hastened to bring in two more pies. They were of the coconut custard gender.

"Oh, yum, yum, gosh, golly!" called Jud, attacking his thirteenth with great gusto. "Ish thish a lil pie I shee before me? Yash, ish a lil pie, pre'y lil pie, all shtuff' wi' cush'ard!"

Don almost wept at the sight of that coconut-custard pie. Coconut by itself would have been bad enough, but the custard was almost more than he could bear.

However, it would never do to show the white feather at this stage of the game. He felt like a great lump of dough, from his head to his feet. But it was all going to be worth while.

With Martha as his wife, he would be able to look back upon this experience with a great deal of pride and joy. He attacked the pie feverishly, but the more he ate, the larger it got.

Suddenly, all the pies inside him began to hold a mass meeting, demanding shorter hours and less congestion. The pineapples and the custards got into a heated argument, and came to blows; and it was not long before the cherries, prunes, and apricots joined in.

There was a riot, and in an instant everything went black before Don's eyes. He wanted to hold on to the bitter end. He clutched at the tablecloth, and groaned, "I love you!" but it was too late. The pies routed him. He slipped off his chair, and landed on the floor, at Martha's feet.

Jud, finishing his thirteenth pie in triumph, bellowed forth his joy. "He'sh gone! Hoo-ray!" He stood up on his chair, and beat his plate with knife and fork, singing a paean of victory. "I'm goin' right out an' buy lil ring for lil 'gage-men' finger!" he called, and jumped unsteadily to the floor. "We'll be married to-morrer!"

But Martha drew back from him, and, without the least warning, flung herself on her knees at the side of the prostrate Don. Unaware of the tears that coursed down her cheeks, silver rivulets of grief, she lifted the foreman's black head in her lap, and kissed his lips, sticky and blue from huckle-berry pie.

"You're not dead, are you, my precious?" she sobbed. "Don, speak to me. I love you! Do you hear, you poor darling? I'm just crazy about you!"

Jud stared at her out of astonished eyes. Here he had won fairly in the duel of pies, expecting to be decorated with her kisses, instead of which she had thrown herself upon the breast of the vanquished!

All these pies in his system had been in vain. The bitterness of defeat lay heavy within him. From that moment onward, Jud Carpenter lost all faith in a woman's word. They said one thing, and meant something else.

How was Jud to know that, nine times out of ten, it is the goat, and not the hero,

who fires the divine spark in a woman's breast? Ah, he might have foreseen! Woman, woman, how are we ever to know you?

"Yu mean to shay, Martha, you're goin' to trus' yureself to him? Him?" begged Jud, growing more miserable with each passing moment. "Are yu goin' to pick a man what cain't even hold pie?"

"Yes!" answered Martha, in tears. "I've just discovered my love for him. It was the way he slipped off the chair. Look at his poor eyes! Help me carry the poor darling into the bedroom. Run for the doctor! Don't stand there like a dummy! Can't you see my heart is breaking?"

Between them, they managed to carry the unconscious foreman into the bedroom. Jud hurried out of the house, only to find every available hand on the Big Eats lying unconscious under the kitchen window. He turned the garden hose on the upturned faces, and Sparky Adams was the first to revive under the stimulus of cold water. "What's th' matter with you!" Jud demanded. "What ails yu?"

"I ate thirteen pies," murmured Sparky, looking dazed. "They was prune, pineapple, crab apple—"

"Run fur a doctor afore I make you eat forty-four more, yu hoppin' son of a grass-hopper!" yelled Jud. "Thar's a man dyin' in thar."

"What's he dyin' from?" asked Sparky, beginning to get his bearings.

"Pie-areeah, yu poor simp!"

VII

DON entertained a rapid convalescence. He had lapsed into unconsciousness a defeated man, but he regained his senses with the wonder of victory in his arms. Was it only a dream, or was it really she who held his hand, and crooned sweet nothings?

"Don," she whispered, "we'll be married just as soon as you're able to talk back to a minister."

"But I—Jud—didn't Jud eat the most pies?" he stammered. "I'm kind o' rattled, Martha. I don't understand."

"A woman's prerogative—" smiled Martha. "But it's you I love. There was something about the way you slipped off the chair—"

Don's face took on a pre-pie glow of health. "I reckon I kin walk now," he laughed weakly, eager to get out of bed. But Martha held him back.

"Dr. Smith says you'd better remain where you are for the next few days," she said, lovingly, but with firmness. "And, Don, will you shut your eyes, and swallow this castor oil? For Martha?"

"I'd take anything fur yu, darlin'," replied Don. "I'd even eat thirteen more pies this vury minute—"

"Please, Don!" she interrupted, horror writ large in her blue eyes. "Don't let's talk about it! I never want to see another pie for the rest of our lives!"

Suddenly they became aware of a third person in the room. Jud looked down upon their happiness, a Jud whose face was the picture of woe, of heartbreak. "I came to congrat'late Don," he explained, wistfully. "How are you?"

That successful swain sat up in bed, and extended a hand to his defeated rival. "Sorry, old man," he murmured; "but if thar's any consolation in bein' the champ pie-eater o' Montana, it's yores."

"Be good to her," Jud whispered, restraining his great grief. "Don't waste her youth over the kitchen stove." He started to leave the room, but when he reached the door he turned about unexpectedly. "Say, Don, I'm thinkin' o' givin' yu a weddin' present—"

"Thet's darn white o' yu, Jud."

"I'm thinkin'," and Jud could hardly

control his voice for the sobs that racked it—"I'm thinkin' o' givin' yu my piebald pony."

Sparky Adams, enriched to the extent of one hundred dollars because of Jud's failure to win Martha, was a happy man as he climbed into his bunk that night. Pink Pill, in the bunk below, was sorrowful over having parted with the hundred that reposed crisply in Sparky's jeans.

"Say, Sparky, what yu goin' to do with thet, now, hundred you won off'n me?" Pink Pill inquired mournfully.

"What am I goin' to do?" repeated Sparky. "Wall, fust o' all, I'm goin' into town an' sit me down at a table in th' Palace Res-too-rant. I'm goin' to eat, thet's what I'm goin' to do. I'm goin' to eat soup, an' fried chicken, an' cucumber salad, an' chilled melon, an' java, an'—"

"An' p-pie?" asked Pink Pill, naïvely.

Almost instantaneously, some thirty arms reached for Pink Pill where he reposed in his bunk. Some thirty muscular arms lifted him into the air, and held him aloft for a moment in giddy suspense, then shot him dizzily through the open window out into the cold, dark night.

"An' thar yu stay, yu pie-eyed progeny of a Persian puma!" cried a spokesman for the pay roll of the Big Eats.

TO A FIELD MOUSE

FEAR in your little heart—

Ah! God forbid that I should put it there!

Trembling, you think of me

As of some lumbering, blundering deity,

Scattering your tiny paper house apart.

Yet, big as I appear and small as you,

The trifling difference betwixt us two,

What is it—if, as I, you could compare

Me with those dumb, blind gods I have to fear!

O little field mouse, quivering in your nest

With those four tiny marvels at your breast,

Nest you so cleverly wove

From some old verses writ to one I love,

Nest hid securely in the gilded frame

Of the great picture that keeps young her fame,

Her own young face she painted long ago—

My long-lost eyes, and wild young breasts of snow—

How happy would she be could she but know

That you have made your nest,

With those four tender babies at your breast,

Behind her picture . . .

How came it you should choose so safe a place,

Safest in all the world, behind her face?

Richard Leigh

Moon Magic

FAMINE STALKED THE ESKIMO VILLAGE, AND A GREATER
WEAPON THAN SPEAR OR KNIFE WAS NEEDED
TO APPEASE THE ANGRY GODS

By Don Cameron Shafer

AS the law of the arctic tribe provided, they would have done away with Icarepi, the Bad One, long before this, but they feared the giant strength of his thick, muscular body, even as they dreaded his inherited influence with the Gods of the Whale.

The bully took advantage of his physical superiority to acquire anything he happened to want. And the whale gods provided an opportune vision any time he chose to violate the unwritten tribal laws or the sacred taboos.

He was always mean and overbearing, threatening and quarrelsome. This did not matter so much during the short arctic summer, when the people were scattered in family groups over the great inland hunting grounds to the south. Then Icarepi, the giant, alone with his family, had only his long-suffering wife to misuse.

But now the People of the Seal were returning to the place of the winter village by the sea, which is in Smith Sound, the upper northwestern corner of ice-harried Greenland. Seven oval skin tents were already strung along the rocky shore when the skin boat of Icarepi pulled in.

His woman and her aged mother were laboring at the paddles while he rested comfortably in the stern on a pile of caribou skins, and steered. All the other families, as they returned one by one, were greeted by a unison of loud shouting, a mad race to the beach to greet them, barking dogs and laughing children. Now only his wife's few relatives came down in silence to meet the bully's boat.

Icarepi, sensing something of this sullen hostility, left the unloading of the craft to his wife, and strode boldly forward toward the little group of his people before the

tents. There was a challenge in his swaggering walk, his ivory-tipped seal harpoon was in his right fist, his big knife was swinging in its leather sheath by his side.

He was a giant only among these Little People of the Snows, standing about five foot eight inches, and weighing, perhaps, one hundred and seventy pounds. There are few Eskimos as large as this.

"Hei! Hei!" he growled, glowering about for an excuse to show his authority. "Who has dared to set his house under the Leaning Rock?"

"Osok," an old man answered. "It is his house."

"Then I shall throw the dirty, half-tanned skins into the sea!" Icarepi roared.

"No," protested the old shaman, who was Osok's grandfather. "Osok arrived first, and he always has had his house under the rock that leans."

"He shall have it there no more!"

"Such is the law—" the shaman began.

"I care nothing for your law!" He spat scornfully on the rocky shore. "Where is the cawing raven, that I may make him tear down this foul nest with his own hands?"

The old man pointed seaward where, far out, like sea birds, a few kayaks were riding the ice-burdened swells.

"It is his place, under the rock," the shaman protested again.

"It's my place now!" Icarepi cried. "On my way back here the Whales told me in a dream that here must my house be, or I would have no luck hunting."

"I would leave it alone," one of Osok's relatives advised. "Osok is of the Moon."

"Of the Moon!" Icarepi sneered. "As if the Moon were stronger than Grandfather Whale!"

"That is as may be; but to move Osok's house will only cause trouble."

"I feed on trouble!" The bully laughed.

"Who dares make trouble with me?"

"You make it, always," the old shaman replied. "The rest of us endure."

"And that is good—endure some more!"

Any opposition, any adverse criticism, appeared to goad the big man into a rage. He roared, and stamped up and down, defying them all.

Then he made the terrified women and children of Osok take down the skin tent, with its transparent window front made of sewn seal membrane, and pitch it farther down the beach. When they had carried their few things away, he sat down to rest and mutter to himself, while his own family erected his tent on the favored site.

II

"We are but few," Osok argued, when he returned and discovered what had been done in his absence, "and the places for houses are many."

"No one dares oppose the mighty Icarepi," his wife taunted.

"The old Moon will take care of that man whenever I ask him to," boasted Osok, who had had a good day at the hunt; "but the matter of a place for a tent is not worth fighting about."

All knew that Osok had power with the moon, but none believed that it was sufficient to cope with Icarepi, the giant.

For, when Osok was only seven winters old, his family decided to indulge themselves in the luxury of raising a girl—a momentous undertaking, and expensive. Few families could afford this, because a girl cannot help with the hunting, and is soon claimed by some young man.

So, to make room for this new baby, Osok went to live with his maternal grandfather, who was a great shaman, and had made many strange visits to the moon. Once, and once only, the moon had come down to him. His descriptions of these visits were a constant source of entertainment during the long dull hours of the winter's darkness.

Osok's four years with the old shaman gave him occult powers, especially in bringing good luck to the hunt. But, being of a laughing, easy-going disposition, he had never invoked this moon magic to harm any one, although it was admitted that he could do so if he chose.

That night the hunters gathered in the tent of Osok, where the crescent stone lamps, with moss wicks, and burning seal oil, cast their flickering yellow rays against the outside darkness. Turn by turn, the Eskimo men recounted their summer's adventures with wild game.

"The Hunting Spirit of the Moon was with me again," Osok related. "We went down to the great inland lake of sweet water where the caribou pass. This season they came in greater numbers than ever before. I made a small kayak, and when my sons drove them into the water, I killed them easily with the lance."

"How many did you kill?" asked a hunter.

"Five times around both hands," Osok replied proudly; "and we feasted every day on caribou marrow and tender meat."

"You brought back only twenty skins," another challenged.

Osok sank back, confused, knowing not what to answer. It was true that he had killed fifty caribou, and he would not be called a liar, but the shame of confessing the loss of thirty skins was almost more than he could bear.

"I gave some to Icarepi at the second landing," he explained, lamely.

The tent trembled with the hunters' laughter.

"He gave thirty skins to Icarepi!" one roared, sarcastically.

All knew to a man, even the women present, to keep the lamps trimmed and the meat boiling, that Icarepi, the bully, had brazenly taken these skins from Osok.

"It's good that he left you any!" another hunter declared.

"You gave them the way you gave him your place for his tent to-day!" a third remarked.

In this storm of laughter, Osok got up hurriedly and left the tent. It was a good joke, but he failed to enjoy it like the rest.

"Icarepi had an unsuccessful hunt," Osok's wife explained. "There were but few caribou where his people summered. They did not have sufficient skins for their winter clothing, and we had plenty."

"So he took what he wanted from Osok!" a hunter observed.

"We gave them without protest."

"Who dares protest when Icarepi demands anything?"

"Oh, as for that," she answered bravely, "my man has the moon power, and

can take care of that fellow whenever he pleases."

"Ya, ya, ya, yah," laughed one. "I'd like to see him try it!"

Shamed and disgraced, Osok sought the highest point of the rocky cliff and stretched his arms aloft to the moon. Softly, pleadingly, he sang:

"Aya, I am sad, Aya,
Aya, I am shamed before my people,
Are the Whales stronger than the Moon?
Aya, give me strength, strength,
I will avenge this wrong.
Aya!"

III

It was growing colder, now, and the days were only a few hours long. Thin sheets of ice formed each night on the inland ponds. The tossing ice floes and small bergs on the broad sea before the Eskimo encampment grew thicker and ever thicker, closer and closer together.

The men went in their kayaks for their dogs, which had been left for the summer on various islands to shift for themselves. Only a few of the best trailers were taken along for the summer hunting.

The sledge dogs were always left behind. Now they barked with joy; gaunt, almost skeleton beasts.

On the rocky cape of the village, all was activity. During the short day the hunters went out in their one-man kayaks and hunted seals in the open water between the ice floes.

While they were gone, the women gathered shrubs for fuel, or stretched the newly caught sealskins upon the ground and scraped them laboriously in the tanning operation. When they were tanned, they worked with bone awl and sinew thread, sewing them into new tent covers.

In their skin kayaks the hunters paddled slowly, silently along the edges of the ice, waiting for a seal to come up to breathe. Whenever one happened to rise within good throwing distance, the ivory-tipped harpoon was launched.

If it struck fairly, the ivory barb pulled from the end of the wooden haft, and the seal was fast on a strong rawhide cord. The haft was attached to another and lighter cord.

Then new ice began to form, and they could not hunt the seals in kayaks. The ice would not hold the weight of a man, and its sharp edges cut the frail skin boats.

But always these arctic people, living entirely upon meat, must hunt to live. In a few stormy days their food was gone.

So now, while the ice was forming, the hunters went inland and killed hares and ptarmigan with bows and arrows, but this was food they did not relish. The women were impatient also for the strong sea ice to come, so they could begin to make the warm winter clothing. They could not do this until the sea was frozen entirely over, or the sea goddess would be angry with them.

But a cold gale came whistling down from the north, and in a few days the ice would hold. The early winter winds broke this ice into long open leads of open water, where the seals came up for air.

Down, down in the green depths below the ice these strange northern animals caught the finny creatures they fed upon, swimming faster than the fastest fish, but always they must come back to the surface for air. How they can remember the watery path to swim back to one narrow open crack in the ice, or to find a tiny blowhole in a square mile of ice, no man knows.

The hunters went far out on the ice, driving their dog sledges, to hunt along the open leads. Soon there was plenty of meat in the tents, and the women shortly had the new tent covers made.

Then the old tent was blanketed with a thick layer of shrubs, and the new cover placed over this to keep out the wind and the cold. When this was done the women began making new undershirts and drawers from the soft skins of young caribou, tanned during the summer, and heavier shirts and pants from the older skins. Boots were made of the stockinglike skins from caribou legs, soled with tough sealskin.

All the men were skillful hunters—they had to be, or perish—but some always were luckier than others. This explains why Osok, hunting alone along a narrow lead far out on the ice, should find two fine seals one morning. He harpooned them and hauled them out upon the ice to kill with his seal club, after which he opened the carcasses, as is the custom, and ate the livers raw for his lunch.

He stood on a long point of ice reaching out into the open water, where three or four large seals were playing just beyond reach of his harpoon. Sooner or later, as he knew, they would come within range of his

arm, but, in the meantime, he could do nothing but wait patiently, and sing his good luck songs under his breath.

While he waited, he stole a glance out over the ice, and saw all the other hunters racing back to land as fast as their dogs could go. He looked behind him in the sky, and saw a dark storm approaching.

But he was nearer shore, and, therefore, could wait a bit longer and still get there in time. Certainly he would soon get another seal.

IV

THE other hunters went scurrying by, with warning shouts to Osok to come on, as the wind began to puff up into a dangerous blow. Last of all came Icarepi, and when he saw Osok alone upon the ice, he turned his dogs and raced toward him, thinking to take by force what he could not get by fair hunting.

He did not dare to rob the other hunters when they were out in groups, for they would have turned on him as one man. Osok alone was fair game.

Icarepi's sledge was empty, for the whale gods have little influence over the hunt. Even though he knew that it is the custom for the successful hunters to divide their kill with the more unfortunate, he could not bear to return to the village empty-handed.

"Hei!" he shouted, as he pulled up and saw Osok's big seals. "Two, hei! Luck sometimes picks strange company."

"The water people have been good to me to-day."

"You had a big seal yesterday," Icarepi remarked.

"Two of them," Osok proudly admitted.

"Good!" Icarepi grinned. "Then you do not need these to-day."

"I need all I can get. Who knows when hunger will come—and who can remember a winter when it failed to pay us a visit?"

"Ho, ho!" Icarepi laughed. "The sea goddess certainly intended those seals of yours for me."

"Hei!" Osok exclaimed, beginning to understand. "What do you mean?"

"She sent them to me, but you killed them before they got to my lead, when they came up to breathe!"

"I killed them, it is true, and they are mine!"

"What belongs to me," Icarepi said firmly, "I will have!"

He had a long, iron butcher knife, well worn, which he had taken from a man of a tribe below, who got it from some people farther south, who found it in a wreck. This knife came glistening from its sheath by his side as he advanced.

Now, Osok did not lack for courage, nor for good judgment. He knew that he was no match for this giant, and that even if his strength were equal, his knife certainly was not. It was only an iron-stone knife, laboriously hammered and chipped from a meteor rock.

Osok, boiling with anger, drew his stone knife, but retreated, step by step. With each motion backward he asked the moon for aid, but, instead of the power for which he prayed, his own strength oozed away with every retreating step.

"Take them," Osok said, weakly. "Some day I shall have my pay!"

"Of a surety!" Icarepi laughed. "Some day, when I have killed two seals and you have none, I shall give you the whiskers."

Osok stood there in a sullen rage, watching his seals being lashed to the other's sledge, and shamed that he was so powerless to prevent this outrage. For the moment he even doubted that the Moon was stronger than the Whales.

"Some day you will bother me too much!" he muttered, as Icarepi went heedlessly away.

Osok was too furious to note that the wind was already opening the ice into dangerous leads. Icarepi, as he sped shoreward, saw a long crack open across the point where Osok stood, but, instead of shouting a warning, he lashed his dogs across and went on.

Another reason why this escaped Osok's attention was that just then a seal raised, well within range, and the harpoon was cast straight and true. For the next few minutes he was bracing with all his strength, hauling at the line, to land his quarry.

He did not know that this final struggle of the dying seal was towing him on a floating ice cake away from the main floe where his dogs and sledges still stood waiting. When he saw what had happened it was too late.

There was nothing Osok could do. The wind blew harder, puff upon puff, and he was drifting slowly out to sea.

And there was nothing that his companions on the distant shore could do. The

whole ice field was fast, breaking up before the wind, and being driven offshore. His only hope was that his little raft of ice might hold together until the storm was over, or might be driven back to shore.

Osok, schooled to hardships, made the best of the situation. He had a seal, and while it was still warm, he skinned it and made a little shelter with the hide, using his harpoon haft as a pole. The edges of the skin he weighted down with pieces of ice or froze fast to the floe. This kept him out of the wind and the intense cold.

He had his fire drill with him, and a bit of the dry moss the Eskimos use for tinder. With this he started a fire, and made a little lamp of seal skin in which he could burn the oil from his seal blubber. Then, curled up within his shelter, he ate what he wanted of the meat, and dozed, waiting for the wind to cease.

V

OSOK stood there on his floating prison, in the cold night wind, chanting his magic songs until his body grew numb with frost, until the rhythm of his own voice all but hypnotized him—and then the moon came floating down to him, a great yellow globe of warm fire. He heard strange voices, and music, even a loud voice shouting:

"I will make you strong, Osok! You shall prevail over your enemy!"

This was very unusual, because it was the first time the moon man had ever spoken to him directly. His grandfather frequently had long conversations with the lunar god in his sleep.

For two whole days and nights the wind blew, and Osok drifted out of sight of land. All about him were grinding floes and ice pans, riding the waves, up and down, up and down.

He was afraid. He was certain that he never would see land again, but it would not do to let the Evil Ones of the Sea know this, or they would take advantage of his fears, so he sang bravely:

"Aya, when the wind blows I am glad,
When the ice tosses,
When the slush forms,
Aya, then I am glad.
Aya."

On the fourth day he was within sight of land again, drifting slowly along the coast, but with no opportunity to reach shore. Then it grew calm and very cold.

The ice cakes quieted down and froze

one to another. By morning, he could make his way to shore by walking here and there where the largest ice cakes touched one another.

Osok's friends and family welcomed him back as one dead. A great feast was given in his honor. A cow walrus had been killed.

All his friends and relatives crowded into the double skin tent where the crescent shaped stone lamps glowed yellow from burning seal oil, the blubber having been well chewed to release this oil. And when his woman had adjusted the moss with the bone pointer, the lamps really gave a good strong light.

Over each lamp a big square soapstone kettle boiled, well filled with seal and walrus meat. Then, when all had fed, they sat upon the skin-covered bed platforms and listened while Osok related his adventures on the ice.

"The moon came right down to me," he finished. "It has given me power to overcome my enemy."

"When?" his brother asked.

"That I do not know," Osok replied, "but it will be soon."

VI

COLDER and colder blew the polar winds, and the snow came hissing down. The wind packed it, and the frost hardened it, until the light sledges of the hunters ran easily and smoothly over the glistening surface.

Each morning they hurried away, for the days were very short now. The runners of their sledges were protected from wear with a thin covering of smooth ice—a mouthful of water squirted down each runner and smoothed off with a mittened hand. With the harpoon lashed into place, the big hunting knife swinging from the steering bows behind, they urged their dogs into a fast run out over the frozen sea.

There were no open leads now, and the ice was covered with deep snow. But underneath this snow the seals kept open their breathing holes in the ice.

These holes were invisible from the surface, and trained dogs were necessary to locate them by the scent of the seal's body. When one was found the hunter examined it carefully to see if it was being used by a seal.

If it was, he cut a block of snow for a comfortable seat, and sometimes piled up a little snow wall as a wind-break. Then

he sat down, his harpoon ready in his right hand, for the anxious wait until the seal came up to blow. This might be a few minutes, or it might be hours, if at all, as the seals have many such blowholes under the snow.

When the seal comes up, the hunter can hear the water gurgling or the animal's hissing breath. At once the harpoon is driven down through the snow, deep into the creature's body. Then, after a brief struggle with the harpoon line, the seal is hauled out and killed.

Osok had one of the best trained dogs in the village for this work, the White One, and he valued it highly. With this dog he was able to get plenty of seals. Many times he was offered a great store of skins and weapons for his dog, but he would not sell.

It was on just such a seal hunt as this that Icarepi demonstrated the giant he was. He was hunting alone, far from the village, when he sighted a large white bear.

Instantly, he leaped from his sledge and cut loose two of his best dogs. They raced over the ice like hungry wolves, and were quickly at the bear's heels. One after another, Icarepi let the other dogs go until the whole team was after the bear.

Now, the big white bear of the north has no fear of dogs. They are only an annoying nuisance to him, and woe to the overbold dog that comes within reach of his swinging claws.

But every time this bear turned to fight or run, a dog was nipping at its heels. To avoid this it sought safety on the narrow ledge of an ice hillock, where, with its back to the wall, it could keep the dogs at a respectful distance.

Icarepi, the hunter, did not hesitate. Snatching a lance from its lashings on the sledge, he ran forward to kill the bear. Probably no other lone hunter of any other savage people would dare to attack a full grown polar bear with such a primitive weapon.

At a little distance from the bear, his dogs before him, he waited a favorable moment to thrust with his lance. But when he did strike, the bear swung a paw and broke the shaft.

With nothing else but his big knife, the hunter urged on his dogs and advanced again. And when the bear turned to snap at one of the dogs, Icarepi plunged the knife deep into its side.

The whirling, dying animal caught him a glancing blow on the shoulder, ripping through the heavy clothing, deep into the flesh, and they both tumbled down to the floe. Icarepi paid no attention to his own wounds as he dressed the bear and loaded it on his sledge.

After this adventure he was more domineering than ever, and had less fear that any of his companions would ever dare to attack him.

VII

It was colder, now, and the family groups moved out of their skin tents into the warmer, better lighted, and more sanitary snow houses. While the houses were being built by the men, block by block, the women packed up the skins, the utensils, and their few household effects.

When the stone lamps were hung and lighted in the new snow houses, they were soon warm and comfortable. The raised sleeping platforms were covered with warm skins, and the dogs crowded into the sheltered, tunnel-like entrance. It was very homelike, and the Eskimos pitied those who had no warm snow house and plenty of furs.

All this time the moon waxed and waned with never a sign to Osok. He waited patiently, night after night, for some message, some voice, but although he prayed loud and long to the lunar deity, no magic came.

Instead, ill-luck and disaster descended upon the village. The weather warmed up, with southerly winds, and it became gray and calm. Then, for many, many hours, the soft snow came slithering down to pile up deeper and deeper, with no polar winds to pack it down, and no cold weather to freeze it over with a hard crust that would hold man or dog.

The hunters were unable to leave the village. They were, in fact, imprisoned within the narrow paths they trod down between the igloos.

For a day or two, while it snowed more and more, they visited from house to house, making the best of it, feasting and singing, and amusing themselves with simple guessing games. But, after a bit, there was no more feasting, because there was nothing to feast upon.

First the family at the lower edge of the village announced that it was without food. The others gave what they could, all except Icarepi, who claimed that he had none.

Then, one by one, they grew hungry—and it is a bitter ordeal to be without food in the arctic winter, with the long night beginning.

By the end of the second moon, a few old people had died, and all the others were weak and light-headed with hunger.

Osok, like the rest, ate his dogs, but he did not slay the White One. Without him there would be no seals for Osok and his family when the snow hardened and he could get out on the ice again.

And now a strange thing happened. The remaining sledge dogs no longer slept in the igloo entrances.

They seemed to know that they were to be eaten, and one by one they disappeared, struggling out into the snow, away from their hungry masters. All went but a few favorite seal dogs who appeared to have no fear.

But, one brief, dim day, the White One disappeared. Osok started out immediately to search for it, fearing that the other dogs, having gone wild, might have pulled it down.

But the belle of the village, the Bird Woman, said that she had seen it near the igloo of Icarepi. When Osok, weak and faint, went up there to look for his dog, he was driven away by the tribal bully with hard language and harder blows—but not before he had seen the white skin of his dog on Icarepi's meat rack.

VIII

Osok, weak and tottering, his childish mind beset with strange hunger visions, awakened from a curious dream. He thought the moon man came down to him in flaming yellow clothing of cold fire, and spoke to him while he slept.

"This is the time!" the lunar god announced. "Now I will give you strength to overcome your enemy."

"Good!" Osok cried.

"The killer of a seal dog should die," the moon man declared.

"It is the law," Osok agreed.

Never doubting that this talk was real, Osok rolled off the bed platform to his feet and prepared himself for battle.

"Now I will go and meet that thief," he boasted. "That dog killer!"

He took his lance in his right hand, and it seemed strangely heavy. By his side, although it fairly weighed him down, was his stone knife. And so he went through

the village, crying out in a strange, weak voice:

"I go now for vengeance! The Moon has given me power! I will have the blood of my enemy!"

His friends crawled out of their igloos, and stared at him as one gone mad.

Osok's maternal grandfather, the shaman, was a very old man, and a very hungry one, but he found strength to get outdoors when he recognized the boasting voice of his grandson.

"Wait, my son!" he called. "Your enemy is still strong, as he has just eaten your dog. He will surely kill you."

"The Moon has given me power!" Osok explained.

The old shaman saw that Osok was very weak and light-headed, and that he must certainly be killed if he went on.

"Wait," he pleaded. "Come with me. I alone of all our people have the Moon power of death over our enemies."

"Hei! Didn't the Moon come right down to me?" Osok demanded.

He looked down the street and saw Icarepi rushing from his igloo, lance in hand, to see who had been calling his name in such a challenging voice. Osok decided to talk the matter over with his all-wise grandfather.

"I will give you the Moon power," the old shaman said as soon as they were safely indoors. "I am old, and will live but a few days, and it should go to you by right of blood and experience."

He beat his little hand drum, and began a chanting song to the moon, while outside Icarepi, the strongest man in the village, called insulting words to Osok and his family and his moon gods.

"This Son of the Moon," the old shaman announced; "this little Shiny One, I now give to Osok."

From his caribou skin medicine bag, containing many curious things, the old man took a bundle of waterproof walrus membrane. As he released the wrappings, he sang:

"Aya-a-ya, the Shining One
He is all-powerful,
He will overcome our enemy,
The Shiny One,
Son of the Moon."

When the last fold of the semitransparent wrapping was laid back, there, upon the shaman's knees, was a heavy, silver-plated revolver of an old pattern.

"Behold the Shiny One; it came from the moon, direct from the sky," the old man explained. "Many years ago, when I was seeking power far out on the ice, the moon came right down and floated over my head. It was a big yellow shape, larger than the largest igloo, with long ropes trailing to the ice. Beneath it was something like a large kettle in which was the moon man. He leaned over and looked down at me and shouted, though I understood no word, and then something came falling out of his pocket and struck near me. I picked it out of the snow. It was the Shiny One. When I looked up again the moon man was very far away."

Osok, being of the Moon, dared to take the strange object in his fingers, but carefully, fearfully, for it was magic.

"Hold it in your hand thus," the old shaman suggested. "Direct its single eye upon your enemy. It never spoke for me but once, and that was with a voice of thunder. I pointed it at the best dog I ever owned, and when it spoke he fell dead at my feet. I tell this now for the first time, and I have kept the Shiny One hidden since that day. Nay, do not look into its eye! Death lurks there."

IX

ICAREPI saw Osok coming, heard his name called in the age old tribal challenge, and awaited him with lance and knife.

"Ho!" he roared. "So it is you! Good, I shall eat you as I ate your caribou, and your seals, and your dog!"

"I shall kill you," Osok retorted, feeling very strong with the Shiny One in his hand. "The Moon has given me power."

"Power!" Icarepi laughed. "You all but fall over your own feet. You couldn't kill a rabbit."

"I can kill you," Osok declared, going closer.

"The Whales fear not the Moon, and Icarepi fears no man!" the bully announced scornfully.

With this, he hurled his heavy lance straight at Osok's breast. The ivory point

struck against the barrel of the Shiny One, and broke in many pieces.

"You see my power!" Osok cried.

"Hei! Hei!" Icarepi roared, startled, but not dismayed. "That was just your good luck. Try your moon power on this!"

He snatched out his big knife and came running. When he struck, Osok caught his descending wrist in time.

In that same instant, Icarepi grabbed the barrel of the Shiny One, which Osok had thrust forward to present its fearsome eye to his enemy's face. Osok pulled back frantically to free it from the giant's grasp.

A dozen men, watching from a safe distance, heard the loud voice of the moon deity, roaring in anger. They saw the flash of his fearsome eye.

Icarepi tottered a moment on uncertain legs, his head in a faint cloud of bluish smoke. Then he sank slowly, lifelessly, to the packed snow before his igloo.

"It is as I said!" Osok cried, triumphantly, although he was greatly frightened by the terrible voice of the Shiny One. "The Moon gave me power—and this which I hold in my hand is the Son of the Moon. See, there, the strange carving that no man can understand!"

They gazed upon it in astonishment, puzzling over the hieroglyphics that none of them would ever decipher.

Andrée, 1896, bon voyage was engraved on the weapon.

"And next," Osok announced, confidently, "I shall bring the cold back so that we can hunt!"

Even as he uttered his boast, the gray air appeared to thin out and turn cool about them. Soon frosty puffs began to come out of the north.

By the next half dawn—the false promise of daylight that would not come for many moons—the needed cold had settled down. The hunters' harpoons once more fleshed themselves in the unwary seals at their breathing holes in the ice.

As a final evidence that famine would not stalk again, the recreant sledge dogs, one by one, came back to their tasks.

COURAGE

ONE robin does not make a spring;
One withered leaf, a fall—
And I have heard a sad heart sing
The best song of them all.

Francis Livingston Montgomery

The Swoop of Doom

IN THIS NATURE STORY OF THE FAR WEST THE LAW OF
THE FANG COMES INTO CONFLICT WITH THE
RULE OF THE TALON

By Vance Hoyt

IT was the dawn of another day of terror for the wild folk of Cold Creek Cañon.

Vapors of mist, herald of the morn, rose from the depth of the cañon, and merged with the saline blanket of fog floating in from the sea, enshrouding the massive, granitic pommel of old Saddle Peak. There, hidden from sight, with eyes far keener than a hawk's, lurked the terror.

But there was nearly an hour now in which beast and bird might venture forth from lair and concealment in search of food, combat, and love, before the swoop of doom would be upon them.

Wren and goldfinch boldly and noisily rustled in thicket and oak, springing their alarm clocks of ecstasy in the sweetest of bell-like, chromatic tones. Only once did they pause in their frantic song feast, and that was when the weird, deep-toned voice of a barred owl floated from the deep oaks far up the gorge.

Down in the valley beyond the entrance of the cañon came the plaintive coo of the mourning dove, the tenderest and sweetest lover of woodland and vale.

Thus the wild folk of Cold Creek Cañon sought food, loved, and fought in the hour of dawn-fog, uninterrupted, save by the raucous scolding of the jay or the scream of some creature that had untimely met its fate.

Then, suddenly, as the sun burst forth through the mist in the east, the silver gray form of a fox passed up the slanting bole of a live oak tree so quickly that its pursuer, for the flicker of a second, was puzzled as to the manner in which it had eluded capture. Swift, crafty, and cunning as is the coyote, the fox was not to be taken by surprise.

In the crotch of the tree, the little one sat back on his haunches and barked once with careful deliberateness, the sound beginning far down in his throat as a mere growl, and rolling up and out into a rasping yip. Then, seemingly amused, he grinned down at the coyote.

Suddenly a fierce resentment seized the fox. His "whiskers" fairly bristled. And it seemed that the more he pondered the situation, the greater became his loathing for this unkempt relative who had dared to press him so severely.

Threateningly, Sir Reynard sprang at the coyote as the larger animal placed his front pads upon the trunk of the oak, as though he, too, might attempt the performance of tree climbing.

The fox's gesture was of the greatest daring. Every hair of his back stood on end, challengingly. His marvelous brush was a furry plume of bristling beauty.

Time after time he rushed down the bole—so slanting was the oak—to within a few feet of his tormentor. With savage fury, he flaunted his glistening needle teeth in the face of the slavering coyote.

He snarled, snapped, and growled, thrusting his slender, black-tipped muzzle forward, defying, tempting, cajoling. The dog fox's grin had turned into a snarl.

Still, there was no argument in the coyote. He realized the disadvantage of his position as well as did the fox. He stalked about the oak stiff-legged, neck overfurred—but he would have to let it go at that.

So, flashing up at the eluder a snarling farewell, the prairie wolf took his leave as silently and swiftly as he had come.

Instantly the fox flattened and froze to the bark of the tree, becoming scarcely perceptible, blending perfectly in color with

the oak. It was as though he sought to vanish from the many pairs of tiny eyes observing him from crevice and thicket.

For a time he remained motionless, staring unblinkingly in the direction the coyote had gone. But his interest was not entirely centered upon the leave-taking of the vanquished foe.

His keen, rabbitlike ears were whispering promptings to him. They were telling him, as accurately as though they were the centers of sight, what was taking place in the higher branches of the tree.

However, not once did he look up. The only time he moved his eyes was when he looked down, gauging the distance between his position and the cool stream below.

Water he did not like. It made his brush heavy, and reduced his speed. And there would be no time for squeezing it out of the hair with his paws.

The sun was shining brightly, now, in a blaze of mauve and golden glory. Any instant the wings of doom would swoop the cañon.

In a moment the fox would be on his way to a cleft far up the side of the gorge, where Mrs. Reynard and her three hungry cubs were impatiently awaiting his return. Food was becoming scarce since the terror had laid siege upon the wild folk of Cold Creek Cañon. And hunger is imperative.

In the gray squirrel that was moving nimbly in the branches above him, there would be food for the three whelps. He and Mrs. Reynard could go without eating until such time as he could make another kill.

His foxy intuition told him what the squirrel was about. It would come a few more feet down the tree nearer to him, then dart out upon a limb that arched across the stream to within a short distance of a sycamore on the opposite bank.

The limb was just above his head, and precisely at the proper instant the fox would come out of his opossum pose—and the squirrel would be his.

Past experience had taught the old dog that tree climbers invariably travel the road of least resistance, which generally consists of branches extending toward the protective foliage of neighboring trees. Fate had placed the squirrel at a disadvantage, and the fox's mouth was drooling expectantly from the nearness of his quarry.

But nimble as the fox was, the squirrel flashed above his head and out upon the

limb, escaping by a hairbreadth the lightning snap of the needlelike teeth. Infuriated by defeat, the fox sprang out upon the limb in pursuit.

Like a bird on the wing, the squirrel took off into space, and in one tremendous and graceful arc reached the firm branches of the sycamore. Then down the trunk of the tree he sped to the ground, and away upstream toward his den.

For the moment it appeared as if the craft of the fox had failed. But during the time he had lain in the crotch of the oak, his ever quick eyes had taken cognizance of a bowlder a little to the right of the sycamore.

Bunching his slender and sinewy body into a furry ball, the fox cleared the space—a good ten feet—coming to a graceful anchorage on top of the mossy rock. Then, bounding to the earth, he glided after the squirrel that darted hither and thither in a panic, just a few feet in advance of its pursuer.

No matter what direction the squirrel moved, the gray flash followed. Inch by inch the bared needle fangs of the gray hunter drew nearer. Then, swift as the slash of an eagle's beak, they caught the screaming rodent in mid-air.

Fetching up in an instant stand, the old dog sank to the earth, and with a growl of terrible contentment fiercely ground his teeth into the neck of his prey.

II

For a moment the fox lay obscured from sight, cautiously glancing skyward, with the limp body of the squirrel dangling from his jowls. His tall, sharp ears were set as if to catch some faint and far-away sound.

The sheen that ran from the nape of his neck to the tip of his long and bushy brush bristled in a splendid defiance. His eyes were flames as he glanced upward into the blue void of the heavens, where, suddenly, there appeared a small, black speck.

A hush, heavy with expectation, laden with peril, settled over the cañon. Not a bird twittered, not a sound was uttered; something was falling from the sky!

As the seconds passed with the frantic thumpings of tiny hearts, the speck became larger and darker, and seemingly dropped with greater speed. Then the black blotch took on the shape of a huge bird, with wings half closed and legs extended to aid in a swifter descent.

Down, down it came until within a few feet of the top of the trees, when with a sudden swish of buffeting wings the condor checked its fall. Hissing and snorting its hungry cry, the terror zoomed down through the cañon in its swoop of doom.

At the great bird swept along, neck extended and beak lowered, its black-pupiled and blood-red eyes scanned the open spaces below, and probed the shadowy depth of thicket and grove.

Not an object was too small or a movement too slight to remain hidden from the telescopic eye of this modern roc. From the height of more than a thousand feet the gray and russet form of the fox had been discerned.

At the speed of a mile in three minutes, the dog fox dashed up the side of the cañon. In his mouth he held the limp, lifeless body of the squirrel. The safety of his den, a quarter of a mile away, was his objective.

With one great slide to the west, and a long swerve to the north, the huge bird circled with the curve of the gorge, and from directly above dived straight as a plumb-bob at the fleeing form of Sir Reynard. But the fox was not to meet death so easily. He and the condor had come to grips before, and he knew the fighting tactics of the winged marauder.

Their enmity dated from the first day the great bird had terrorized the wild folk of Cold Creek Cañon, more than a month previously. Fur was missing from the coat of the fox, and feathers were missing from the plumage of the condor.

Like a frightened lizard, the little animal melted into the protective entanglement of a thorny brake of wild gooseberry bushes. But only for the instant that the condor swooped over him did he remain in seclusion. Then, with a bark of fierce defiance, he was out, and away up the side of the cañon.

Without a single flap of its enormous uptilted wings, whose expanse was all of eleven feet, the huge, glossy-black bird arose by a series of spirals and gyrations, circling the fleeing fox leisurely. The white spots under its spread pinions were as plainly visible as the insignia of an army airplane.

Somewhere near a hundred years was the age of this warrior of the air, as the worn tips of his wings testified. His bald head was greatly wrinkled, and his red

comb shone brilliantly in the sunlight as he dropped his long and stringy neck, exposing its white ruff, and snorted down at the puny fleeing creature on the earth. Then again, in the very poetry of flight, the condor suddenly volplaned.

Still, the fox was just as certain and clever in his movements. Halting instantly in the prints of his feet, he sprang to one side—the trick of the rabbit—and vanished underneath the overhang of a jagged mass of rocks.

The terrible talons closed a fraction of a second too late. And once more the dog fox voiced his hatred for the arrogant ruler of the sky; then away he sped, still holding his prey, before the bird could gather wing for another attack.

The condor had played his trump card in that cycloid dip, the line of swiftest descent. He was forced, for the moment, to permit the fox to escape without further onslaught. The bird's advantage would lie in the open, where there is a scarcity of chaparral and boulders.

With the slightest flap of his glorious pinions, the huge bird rose on the crest of the wind, and with slow, graceful gyrations spiraled upward and upward, until once again he appeared, a black-winged specter, wheeling through space.

The fox came to a halt, and with cocked head stood looking upward. For a moment he sat back upon his haunches, lolling—having dropped the limp body of the squirrel upon the ground—contemplatively observing the great bird sweeping across the face of the sky.

Suddenly, from the movements of the condor, it was apparent he had sighted prey. The next instant, with closed wings, the marauder came down like a thunderbolt in one mighty swoop.

The fox was a hundred yards from his den, and few animals can travel faster than he when pressed. But the velocity with which the bird fell from the heavens was appalling. The little gray hunter was at a disadvantage this time.

So swiftly did the condor descend, that before the fox was within a hundred feet of his den the giant of the air had swept the rocky ledge that skirted the entrance. The fluffy ball of puppyhood that had been tumbling about in innocent play an instant before was whisked out over the void of the gorge, as if caught up by a gust of wind and carried away.

Circling with majestic, unimpassioned grace, sweeping up spiral by spiral with his prey gripped beneath him, the monstrous bird mounted high above the pommel of the rugged mountain. Then the condor released his short and stubby talons, and the furry ball dropped, like a plummet, to the rocky peak below.

In a moment the killer descended to his aerie, secure from the onslaughts of rival beasts and birds, and settled himself to gorge and bask for awhile in the warmth of the sunlight.

III

THE fox puppy was hardly a meal. About eighteen pounds of food each day is required to appease the appetite of so large a bird as the condor. And this must be food well ripened, from five to ten days old. However, the catch of to-day would be sufficient for a portion of a feast a week hence.

King of his species, old and mateless, the condor had drifted down from the high Sierras to the Coast Range, and laid siege upon Cold Creek Cañon, because of its abundance of animal and bird life. But there was a price upon the head of this rare bird.

Since the first streak of day, having approached under cover of the fog, a man lay hidden in the thick undergrowth of chaparral on top of the east ridge of the cañon. Now he arose to his feet and moved a little farther down the deer trail, where he sat in the shade of an outcropping of rock. Again he placed the binoculars to his eyes, and scanned the expanse of the gorge.

The man knew that any zoo would give a goodly sum of money for so fine a specimen of the California condor, as there are only four such birds in captivity. And he had taken the matter up with the State game commissioner.

Alden was a student of animal lore and nature. From his vantage point he had witnessed many a tragedy at the hour of dawn, the eternal strife for food in the survival of the fittest. But in all these grim scenes of struggle and death, not one had affected him as the drama that had just been enacted a few moments before.

The wild heart of the man went out in sympathy to this fox family that had so suddenly been bereaved of one of its members. And there were reasons for this kindly sentiment.

The man and the old dog fox were friends of long standing. For five months they had eaten and slept under the same roof, Alden having caught the animal in a box trap and made a pet of him.

But the spirit of Silver Boy, which was the name the man gave to the fox, was never tamed or made content to abide in captivity.

Still, the selfish desire of man to harbor a pet, the aboriginal instinct of a forgotten age, predominated until, in a most extraordinary manner, the fox saved his master's life by slaying a rattlesnake that had crawled on Alden's bed in the night.

For this deed the man had given Silver Boy his freedom; and, by his wits, cunning, and craft, the gray hunter again took up the never ceasing battle for food and life, kith and kin.

Although tragedy now lay heavy upon him, the fox was dauntless in his savage way. For an hour he lay upon the ledge in front of his den, panting and quivering from the nervous tension of the hatred that surged through him.

Never longer than a second did he permit his gaze to roam from the pommel of the towering horned mountain. And not longer than a minute did he remain in one position.

When lying, in an instant he would be upon his feet, pacing the ledge. Then again he would fall down, lying flat upon his stomach, with all four legs stretched out, panting, his little red tongue dripping, licking his chops as though his mouth were dry.

He was never comfortable, ever shifting from one side to the other, now on his haunches, staring eagerly, fiercely, rasping out yip after yip in savage defiance.

Once Mrs. Silver came stalking out of the den, tail bushed and hair standing on end; but her lord and master forced her back at the point of his muzzle. Likewise, twice he drove the two remaining whelps yelping into the confines of the cave.

All of this Alden observed through the binoculars. Now he moved down the deer trail to within a short distance of the ledge. But long before he came into sight, Silver Boy knew of his presence.

Concealing himself beneath a clump of scrub oak, the man stood looking down into the entrance of the den. His old pet had vanished. But then, as quickly, the fox reappeared, and crouched at the edge of the

ledge, glaring up at him curiously, inquisitively, questioningly.

Alden began to talk to the fox to reassure him of his friendship.

"That's a good old Silver Boy," he said softly, drawing nearer. "You remember your pal, don't you? I'm not going to disturb your little family.

"See! I'm your friend," he went on. "Here's a piece of cheese I've brought for you. What do you think of that, Silver Boy? A nice, big piece of cheese—your favorite titbit."

Bending down, Alden held the tempting morsel toward the fox, coaxing him to come and get it.

Slowly, Silver Boy came to a standing posture, testing the air searchingly, wrinkling his little slender muzzle, drinking in the delicious odor of the cheese.

The sound of his old master's voice, associated with the offering of tasty food, brought back memories of pleasing companionship, and he became less cautious. He licked his chops expectantly, and emitted a soft growl, almost a whine, thrusting his snout forward, asking for the titbit in the only way he knew—a peculiarity he had acquired in captivity.

"Come, Silver Boy, and get it!" Alden tempted. "You know that I won't hurt you. I'm always your friend, old pal. Come, Silver Boy!"

But the sly animal moved only a foot nearer, and not a step farther would he come. A struggle was going on within his wily and cunning little brain, a battle between the wary perceptions of the wild creature and the less cautious confidence of domesticity.

The intelligence of past experience told him that the man was his friend. Alden had always been kind to him during the five months of their companionship. But the low growls of Mrs. Silver and the whines of the two cubs stayed the impulse to eat from his former master's hand. The old dog sat back upon his haunches and barked to express the quandary of his mind.

The nature-loving soul of the man understood. From his position he could plainly see the eyes of the tragic little family, glaring out at him in apprehension from the dark interior of the cave.

No one had come so near to their den, save the terrible winged death that had just swept away one of their loved ones. How were they to know friend from foe?

"I understand, old boy," Alden said presently. "Here it is. Take it in to the family." So saying, he tossed several pieces of the cheese upon the ledge below.

In a flash, three furry bodies darted out from the entrance of the cave, one larger than the other two, and the pieces of cheese vanished as though they had melted in space. Such a growling, and snapping, and snarling as followed!

Then back into the den they fled, and not a sound came forth to denote their presence. Everything was as quiet as if the ominous bird of prey himself lurked at the door of their home.

Oddly enough, Silver Boy had made no attempt to bolt the food, but stepped back so that his family could feast upon it. And, in that fraction of a second, he glanced above, his keen, quick eyes detecting the danger that even the man had failed to note.

For a moment the fox stood, slightly crouched, belly to the ledge, his fierce eyes watching intently the movements of the condor far above.

The acquisition of food is a never ceasing search for so rapacious a bird, and, wherever found, it is only natural for the killer to return for other prey.

But the marvelous eye of the condor had detected the presence of the man hidden beneath the manzanita. The bird quickly veered to the left, and circled off down the cañon, his great wings never flapping, but careening and tilting gracefully up and down, floating on the breast of the wind.

Gradually, in a magnificent swoop, the giant of the air wheeled below, and came to a majestic stand on a huge boulder at the entrance of the gorge, where it broadened out into the valley beyond.

Alden stepped into view, and stood studying the condor through his glasses.

"An arrogant old bird, isn't he?" he remarked to the fox. "But you'll be rid of him yet, Silver Boy. His days of marauding are numbered.

"No, we mustn't kill him," he continued to address the fox, as he had always talked to his pet in days of yore. "We'd have the State game commissioner on our necks. But we'll capture and deport Mr. Condor in the interest of natural history. What do you say, my friend?"

He turned to the fox, but the ledge was bare. Silver Boy had retired to his den.

And not until dusk would he again come forth to resume his search for food.

IV

ALDEN carefully picked his way along the ridge to within a hundred yards of the condor. Here, hidden in the rank, sweet-smelling chaparral, he settled himself, feasting to his heart's content in his study of this magnificent bird.

Hurriedly he made a test sketch upon the pad he took from his pocket. What a picture for the nature artist to do in oil! Monarch of the sky, the last of his breed!

The old male bird's plumage shone like black satin as he preened his feathers. The orange of his chin and the greenish-yellow folds of his neck were plainly visible in the sunlight.

He was a wonderful bird, a majestic figure at rest, with his red-rimmed, piercing eyes. And there was nothing that those eyes did not see.

The condor was well aware of the man's presence. He toed about, with his great wings hunched and half spread, snorting hoarsely, and whistling sibilant hisses.

Now and then the killer would snap his beak together, making a peculiar sound. The lower mandible clipped in beneath the upper, giving the bird a fierce and savage expression as he drew his bald and wrinkled head far down into the white ruff at the base of his long and bare neck.

Finally the winged giant became so uneasy, owing to the nearness of the man, that he took off in a rather clumsy fashion for so graceful a bird when on wing. Up the cañon he floated on motionless pinions, with the five white feather fingers of each wing tilted skyward.

More than ever, Alden was resolved that he would capture this splendid specimen of the largest bird that flies. For more than a month, now, the marauder had harassed his friends, the wild folk of Cold Creek Cañon. It was time that he put an end to the reign of terror.

It took him several days to complete his plans. It was no easy task to construct a trap that would capture so shy and so large a bird. But at last the man's ingenuity conquered the problem.

The trap was rather a huge affair, and it took Alden the better part of a day to pack it from his cabin in Old Topanga over the ridge to Cold Creek Cañon.

Only upon two objects had Alden ever

seen the condor alight, the aerie on the pommel of Saddle Peak, and the great boulder at the entrance of the cañon. The latter he chose for the location of the trap.

By the aid of ropes he managed to hoist his equipment to the top of the rock. Here he assembled his trap, truly an oddly constructed piece of mechanism, but quite efficient, Alden thought, for his purpose.

The trap was composed of a series of long and slender arms, made of light wood, bowed upward, like the staves of a round basket. They were hinged six inches apart on a circular base measuring four feet across.

The lower ends of these curvilinear staves pointed upward, circlewise, a distance of fifteen inches, and upon the ends there rested a disk plate. Beneath this disk was a heavy spring, one end attached to the bottom of the plate, and the other extremity made secure to the center of the circular base.

To set the trap, he stretched the spring and held it taut by a clasp beneath the disk, so that when the condor alighted upon the plate, the weight of the bird would trip the clasp and release the spring. This would cause the plate to snap down and the curvilinear staves to rise into a cage-like formation, holding the quarry a captive.

Alden had caught many birds with a similar, although smaller, arrangement. But he was not so certain that his plan would meet with success in the case of the condor.

It was dusk before he had everything arranged to suit him. The slender curvilinear staves lay obscured upon the surface of the boulder, hid beneath a covering of dry grass. Likewise, the disk was concealed; although it stood fifteen inches above the surface of the rock. And, resting upon this, was the carcass of a chicken.

As Alden made his way along the deer trail that crossed the ridge into Old Topanga, he observed Silver Boy standing boldly out on the ledge in front of his den. The trail passed within a short distance of the cave, and, as the man drew near, he spoke to the animal, bidding him a good night.

In turn, the fox barked in his peculiar manner, the sound beginning far down in his throat as a mere growl, and rolling up and out into a rasping yip. Then he darted off the ledge and scooted down the side

of the cañon toward the huge boulder, his gray and russet body closely hugging the earth.

At the moment the man did not understand the actions of the fox, as Silver Boy had never before run from him. He looked about for an explanation, but there was nothing to be seen that would account for the old dog's unusual behavior.

Then, suddenly, far in the west, Alden's eyes caught the black speck of the condor, high in the heavens, floating in across the golden wake of the setting sun. In its death-dealing talons he could see some object of animal life struggling for its freedom. It was plainly discernible through the binoculars.

For a few moments the great bird soared over the rugged horned mountain. Then he hovered directly above the pommel of Saddle Peak. Suddenly something came whirling down through space to the aerie below. And, following it, the condor dropped, vanishing from sight.

On seeing his enemy come down to earth for the night, Silver Boy veered in his course and trotted off unconcernedly, apparently upon some hunting expedition. Although the winged marauder had not, as was his custom, come swooping up the cañon, the fox was not to be frustrated. He knew that there would be other opportunities of wreaking vengeance.

"So that is your ruse, Silver Boy," the man said to himself, awed by the intelligence of the little gray beast. "Apparently you do not forget; you know the purpose of a snare. You seek to lure the old bird into my trap, inveigle him as a decoy. I take my hat off to you, old pal."

V

THE next morning, at daybreak, Alden concealed himself in a clump of fragrant lilac at the top of the ridge, opposite the entrance of the cañon.

All day he watched, but the condor did not fly near the trap. Only once did the great bird sweep the gorge. Even then, long before he reached the boulder, he rose high in the air, and after circling for some time veered to the west and disappeared among the crags of the Malibu Range. Seemingly, some finer sense than sight or hearing had warned him of danger.

Day after day Alden returned to the cañon, where he lay hidden in his accus-

tomed place, waiting and watching, hour by hour, with the patience of a true naturalist. But the condor always refrained from settling upon the boulder.

Instead, he would float for long intervals at a time, far above the trap, glaring down at the inviting bait, with his red-rimmed, fierce, and eager eyes. Then away on the wind he would careen, his great pinions aslant, combing the cañon in his swoop of doom, terrorizing the wild folk as they scurried for burrow or den.

Two weeks passed, and every night Alden added new bait to the trap to become seasoned by the elements, thus making it more tempting.

And during these visits, as he returned along the deer trail, where he had strewn bits of cheese and scraps of meat, he would often see two fiery lights gleaming from some thicket. Then the fox would bark his usual thanks, and Alden knew that his old pet understood.

And each time that Silver Boy let his presence be known—as he ate of the offering placed near the trail that led down to the boulder—the man's confidence in the gray hunter grew. Alden had always contended that no animal can equal a fox in cunning and understanding. Some day, he believed, the old dog would prove his theory in beguiling the condor into the theory by beguiling the condor into the

Twice Silver Boy and the condor had come to grips, neither proving the victor. And once, under the cover of darkness, when the man had climbed near the aerie of the great bird—in hopes of capturing it by main force—he had seen the fox rush his enemy. But the king of the air, in the nick of time, pitched off into space, and vanished in the blackness of the night, snorting and hissing.

Then the test came. It was at dawn, as Alden had expected.

At the first mauve streaks of day, high above in the heavens, appeared the marauder. On the ledge in front of his den sat the crafty dog fox. By the aid of his glasses, the man could see that both were intently watching each other. Eagerly he awaited the beginning of the drama he knew was sure to come.

For a long time the condor circled with its motionless wings, now and then volplaning in a lightning swoop. Down, down, the great bird would drop until within a hundred feet of the ledge, then suddenly

he would shoot upward, rising again to an immense height, gyration upon gyration, soaring and wheeling through space in an apparent effortless ecstasy of motion.

The monarch of the air was playing with this lowly beast of the earth, testing the fox's nerve, as it were. But, apparently, there was no terror within the heart of the little furry body that stood so boldly out upon the ledge.

Only once did Silver Boy flatten himself, and that was, from all appearance, an involuntary movement, more from instinct than from fear.

The old dog was bidding defiance to his enemy. He was a living picture of savage cunning as he stood his ground, fangs bared, ears flattened, his long black feelers bristling, a fierce grin on his face.

Then, suddenly, in the swoop of doom, the killer came down for his prey.

Instantly the muscles of the fox tightened. A quiver, scarcely perceptible, surged through the slender, sinewy body of the little hunter.

Like a flash Silver Boy vanished from the ledge, just as the terrible talons reached for him. He dashed, a gray phantom, along the deer trail, down into the cañon below.

A buffeting of the mighty wings followed, and the condor checked its fall. It flapped once, arose, veered, and swooped again. But the bird was too late. The gray fox melted into a tangle of wild cucumber vines.

Once more the little warrior swept along the trail, always moving down to the floor of the cañon, leaping rocky obstacles, and whipping around shrubbery. Again came the swoop of the bird—and the talons closed on air.

Out darted Silver Boy from under cover, and away he went with the wind. Lower, lower, he sped into the depth of the cañon. Nearer and nearer he approached his goal, the great boulder.

And, swoop upon swoop, the condor reached for him, but was always that fraction of a second too late.

The heart of the man was thrilled by the scene before him, a bit of animal strategy which he knew he could never hope to witness again.

Slipping from rocky prominence to thicket, a gray and russet flash flitting over the earth like a shadow, the fox reached the bottom of the gorge unharmed.

Hidden beneath a dense brake of ferns, pausing for a rest, seething with rage, he barked in savage vindictiveness up at the winged killer. Bark upon bark he uttered, and so quickly that the sounds fairly rolled from his throat.

It was his battle cry, and the plucky little animal set his muscles for the final dash, the trump card of his ruse.

VI

BETWEEN the bed of ferns, where Silver Boy crouched in concealment, and the protective shrubbery at the base of the boulder, lay an open space, probably two hundred feet across. This the fox would be forced to negotiate in order to complete his stratagem.

Could he cover the distance in safety before the condor would be upon him, the man asked himself? It appeared doubtful.

Apparently the great bird thought that the fox might move out into the clearing. He did not rise far above the earth, but kept wheeling in narrow circles just over his prey.

Now and then, with his long, bare neck fully extended, his legs crooked, and his stubby talons hanging down like hooks, he would come to a pause a few feet above the ferns, hissing and snorting his death cry.

Craftily, Silver Boy awaited his opportunity. His enemy was about to place himself in the position for which the old gray strategist had been waiting.

Time after time the condor skimmed above the fox, and with each circle nearer he came to the earth. Then the killer's talons touched the fern tops just above the little animal's head.

Like a flash of light, and hugging the ground so closely that his back was scarcely perceptible above the grass, Silver Boy raced into the open.

The condor had seriously blundered, in that he was facing in the opposite direction from the boulder, as he swept down. He also had ventured too near the earth. Before the great bird could rise and circle for another dive, the little strategist was halfway across the clearing.

With one flap of his mighty wings, the condor shot a hundred feet into the air, and as he mounted he veered, circled, then dived in a long, graceful slant, his legs hanging beneath him, his claws reaching, opening and closing like grappling irons.

It happened in an instant. The man—a lone and silent witness—caught his breath in a gasp.

There came a whirl of buffeting wings, a terrible hiss, and the hooks of the bird's right leg caught the fleeing animal in his back just above the hips, and raised him from the earth.

With a rasp of pain and rage, clicking his fangs together furiously, the fox writhed violently as he rose, finally hurling himself free of the grip.

Falling back to the earth, some twenty feet, he vanished in the thicket at the base of the boulder. Here he growled savagely to himself, licked his wounds, and barked his defiance at the winged thing that had tortured him.

More than ever there was a tender spot in Alden's heart for the fox, and he felt a great pride in the splendid courage his old pet had shown. He hoped that Silver Boy was not greatly hurt.

But the gray fox's mission as a decoy was not finished. Constantly he barked and darted out into view, seemingly tempting his enemy to come lower, in hope that he might seek the bait of the trap.

Thirty minutes passed, then an hour. Still the shy old bird remained aloof, circling high above, glaring down fiercely with its telescopic eyes.

Then, as time passed, and the sun arose higher, the marauder became more daring, and gradually dropped, gyration by gyration, wheeling nearer and nearer to the trap.

The condor became so bold that he seemed to have dismissed the elusive fox from his mind, and centered his attention solely upon the carrion food that lay so invitingly on the boulder.

Suddenly he drew in his wings, and dropped to a fluttering suspension a few feet above the luring bait. But this was only for an instant, and he rose with a

whistle and a flap, clicking his beak together angrily, as though he were vexed at himself that his courage had failed him.

Again and again he repeated the maneuver, but nothing happened to destroy his growing confidence.

Finally, with a soft fluttering of pinions, he came to a feather-light stand, slowly settling his weight upon the disk, where lay the bait.

With a metallic sound the spring beneath the plate released, and the curvilinear staves quickly rose and snapped together, ensnaring the killer in a huge and sturdy cage.

Snorting and hissing furiously, flapping his mighty wings helplessly, the condor tore at the staves with talon and beak, but in vain. The monarch of all winged life would never again raid the wild folk of Cold Creek Cañon.

Highly elated, Alden stepped out from his hiding place. There had just been enacted the finest bit of cunning he had ever seen.

"Well done, Silver Boy!" he shouted down to the fox. "You're a pal after my own heart. Come out; there's nothing more to fear."

Silver Boy darted out from cover, and, although he limped, and there was a red spot on his hip, he passed speedily up the cañon toward his home.

Not once did he pause or look back, nor did he bark. Swiftly he sped, but never in a straight course, always darting to right or to left.

At the top of the ledge Silver Boy paused, and, posing in all his defiance, he looked off down the cañon toward his defeated foe, the captive condor.

Once he barked, but that was all. Then he sat back upon his haunches and grinned.

A moment later he vanished into his den. His strategy had won for him still another victory against heavy odds.

I HAVE SEEN GREAT POPPIES

I HAVE seen great poppies nod,
Oh, redder than the moon,
In which the bees lay drinking
On a drowsy afternoon,

Then homeward climb, so nectar-drunk
They could not find the stair,
But lost the wisdom of their wings
And staggered on the air.

Charles Divine

Christmas Gifts

THE STORY OF A YULETIDE OFFERING THAT WENT ASTRAY,
BUT MANAGED TO FIND A WELCOME AMONG STRANGERS

By Margaret Busbee Shipp

"SHALL I write Nell and Jerry about the way we searched for their vase?" Mrs. Clinton asked her husband.

"It would be a running account of the trip, wouldn't it, Jean?" he questioned in his turn. "I'll make an affidavit that you ransacked Persia, Egypt, and Greece; that you merely glanced at the Sphinx in passing, and hastily snatched up a carpet in Bagdad—but the greater part of the time was given to hunting a vase for Nell."

"And, after all, I found it in Paris at our same faithful dealer's. I know the price was a wicked extravagance, but one can't measure line and color by dollars and cents." Her radiance clouded somewhat.

"Do you think Nell will love it enough?" Jean demanded. "Perhaps I had better tell the dear child how beautiful it is, in case she doesn't recognize it for herself. She's such an earnest young thing, and she has faith in my taste. There had to be something very choice on that queer mantelpiece of hers; it demanded the unusual."

Clinton had not seen the house which his wife's niece had recently acquired, but he had been told all about the mantelpiece in the room which had been the parlor when the house was built. The mantelpiece was high, and the shelf narrow, and in the center there was a niche. Evidently it had been made for some highly prized object, so that no careless hand would be apt to knock it off.

When Mrs. Clinton saw it she said at once:

"Now, Nell, this room depends on what is put in that niche. The light from the window falls directly on it. The mantel is really at a skillful height, because the eyes focus there."

"What in the world would you suggest, Aunt Jean?" Nell asked. "We're fright-

fully cramped for money just now, after buying this place. Jerry's great-uncle built it nearly a hundred years ago, and it was sold out of the family after his death. When Jerry had a chance to buy it back he jumped at it. It really makes a wonderful place for him to write nine months out of the year, and then we can go to the city for the winter. We both adore fixing it up. But that niche gets the best of us. It's like a dead eye. My Sheffield vase didn't look right in it, somehow."

Mrs. Clinton shivered at the idea.

"I'll *think*," she said significantly.

Nell was quite content to let it go at that. Her aunt had motored to the New England village to say good-by to her before starting on a trip around the world, and from happy experience, Nell had learned that Aunt Jean's thoughts were delightfully productive of gifts.

Mrs. Clinton had been surprised herself to realize how difficult it was to find the unique and flawless thing which was to crystallize the beauty of that austere room. Although she had picked up a possibility or two, she had never felt satisfied until she reached Paris, and the old dealer, with whom she had dealt for years, had called to see her about a small but precious collection of art treasures.

Jean Clinton knew her search was ended the moment her eyes rested on the exquisite vase, with its dignity of line, its rich turquoise glaze, its delicately patterned arabesques.

When she drove back to the hotel with her treasure, she did not dare trust it to a steamer trunk or even to a suit case handled by a porter. Wrapping it carefully in a soft silk negligee, she carried it herself in a bag which she would not allow any one else to touch. The cynical French porter

and the sophisticated steward alike thought it must be a bottle of very rare vintage.

The customs man was not particularly agreeable about her purchase when she reached New York, for when she showed the receipted bill, he sagely concluded that if she admitted that much, more must be concealed. There was quite a delay before he grudgingly accepted her statement, so the Clintons missed the train they hoped to take, and dined at home that night at ten instead of seven. But minor discomforts were not to be considered when the precious vase was safe across the sea at last.

As they sat before an open fire, with the delicious sense of being at home in time for Christmas, Mrs. Clinton put the vase on a table near them and watched the play of firelight on the luster of the arabesque decorations, iridescent gold, green, purple, ruby. Her eyes delighted in it.

"Just this one night I'll keep it here," Jean said. "If I looked at it two nights I simply couldn't give it to Nell. I'm only human!"

II

THE next morning she unpacked a portrait which had been sent away in her absence to be cleaned and varnished. It had been returned so well packed that she decided to use the same folds of excelsior around the vase.

Definitely she wrapped it up, first in tissue, then in soft old silk, then felt, and last the excelsior. Winters, the old butler, murmured deferentially that it was a better job than a professional packer could make.

"Take it out in the kitchen, now, Winters, and get that wooden box in the attic closet to put it in," Mrs. Clinton commanded. "You can use the rest of the excelsior to stuff in the corners."

Winters departed, depositing it all on the kitchen table while he went to get the box. On the way back, Mrs. Clinton stopped him to hang the portrait—and while he had the stepladder he might as well adjust the shades. Naturally there were many things to be done when the house had been closed for months.

Then Winters went to pack the vase, and returned at once to ask his mistress where she had put it. It was gone!

Foreboding knocking at her heart, Mrs. Clinton hurried to the kitchen to question her colored cook.

"Lawdy, Mis' Jeannie, you don't mean dat 'celsior trash? Wintuhs come in and dump it down on de table Ah jes' had washed—his ole packin' trash—and de trash man he come in dat same minit, and Ah give it ter him, and he dump it in wid de garbidge, and it's done gone on de trash wagon."

Mrs. Clinton's lips were dry. "How long ago?" she asked faintly.

"Ah reckon 'bout thutty minits. He jes' flang it on de wagon wid his pitchfork, and den he flang dem two packin' boxes on top of dat, and den he went along ter git udder folkses' trash."

That aristocrat of vases under the accumulated trash and garbage of blocks! As she walked quickly out of the kitchen, Jean's throat choked.

Her husband bumped into her in the butler's pantry and took her in his arms. Winters had told him of the disaster.

Tears were in Jean's eyes, but she managed a forlorn little smile.

"Suppose we give Nell one of the rugs, dear?" he suggested comfortingly. "Not the Bagdad carpet; that's your souvenir of the trip, and nobody shall have that except over my mummy. But what about the wine-red one? It has an especially good border. Or the antique with the star flowers, if you like?"

"After you were so pleased to find the flower of Hinnai pattern!" Jean exclaimed reproachfully. Although Clinton had been elated over his purchase—a rug with the "starlike petals that brighten the mountains," which Mahomet had called "the chief flower of this world and the next"—he was willing to give it to Nell now.

How blessed it was to have a husband so sympathetic for any distress of his wife; how it took the sting out of a disappointment! She lifted her eyes to his with what he called the "dancing fairies" shining again in their brown depths.

"What a good sport you are, Jean!" he declared. "There never was anybody like you. The next time we go to Europe I'm going to find a vase for you, if I have to join an archaeological expedition or rob a museum!"

"Never mind me, dearest. It was Nell I was thinking about; she's the only one who has lost a vase. I can always keep my own perfect one, and it can't be stolen or broken or 'flang on de trash wagon,' for Keats himself gave mine to me."

Her voice was tender as she murmured the lovely lines:

"Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
Leadest thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
And all her silken flanks in garlands drest?"

Then she paused and said impetuously:
"If only Nell doesn't put a shiny new silver vase in that niche!"

III

NELL'S aunt was not the only person with benevolent intentions toward the Niche, as Jerry and Nell had begun to capitalize it in their thoughts. For Jerry had an aunt of his own, and a letter came from Jerry's Aunt Charlotte, announcing that she was coming down for a Christmas visit, and would bring a gift to put in "that curved place over the parlor mantelpiece."

"The saints preserve us—and speed up about it!" Jerry groaned. "I'll bet you five berries she brings that pickle jar that she adorned with sealing wax in dabby spots. It has been on her whatnot ever since I was a kid. Or maybe the stuffed owl, if it hasn't lost the rest of its feathers. Its head rivaled a bald eagle's the last time I saw it."

"Oh, she wouldn't!" his wife gasped.

"Well, Aunt Charlotte's an old dear, and I'm awfully fond of her, but she is—call it thrifty! When she wants to make a present she doesn't go to Ye Gift Shoppe to buy something; she hunts around in the china closet to see what she can spare the easiest. I'm her only nephew, and I used to have jolly times at her place when I was a kid, so I can't hurt her feelings; but it's a hundred to one shot that she'll bring something to the niche which will kill the room like knock-out drops."

"Oh, Jerry, what will we do?"

"Probably we'll have to shut it up, because there's no telling when she'll swoop down on us for a little visit, and she'll look for that damn pickle jar the first thing. There was an awful piece of imitation Wedgwood in her front room—a sort of sickly purple, and shaped like a champagne cooler—maybe she'll dump that on us. Wish I hadn't bought this house if I've got to live with that purplish Wedgwood or hurt the feelings of my oldest relative. Well, brace up, little one; time to go to the station to meet her."

Aunt Charlotte looked so old that it was

difficult for Nell to realize that Uncle Russell belonged to a preceding generation. Aunt Charlotte's was the sort of old age which seems to act as a drier and preservative, leaving her as wrinkled as a dried apple, but still quite spry.

After doing justice to Nell's appetizing luncheon, she announced in her chirruping voice: "I know you two are in a hurry to see your present, so we won't wait for Christmas Day. I brought it along instead of sending it, because it was quicker—not because express costs a very pretty penny in these days."

Jerry winked openly at his young wife.

Nell was feeling too dismal in spirit to return even a gleam. She was a serious little soul, and her new home was of paramount importance to her.

Aunt Charlotte produced a package stoutly wrapped in brown paper. No silly Christmas fixings for Aunt Charlotte! Nell braced herself mentally and tried to twist her lips into a smile of anticipation.

"How thoughtful of you, Aunt Charlotte." Her voice was mechanical. She felt like the drowning when sinking for the third time, and caught at a straw of hope: "I do hope it will fit the niche."

Maybe it wouldn't. If only it wouldn't!

"Oh, it'll fit all right," the brisk old lady returned. "The niche was built for it. Uncle Russell set such store by it. You see, he was captain of a sailing vessel, and he went to China, and he did a big favor for an important Chinese. It was something private, because Uncle Russell never told anybody what it was. He was a Manchu or a Mongol prince or something like that which began with M—anyway, he was a high cockalorum, and he gave Jerry's Great-uncle Russell this present."

Aunt Charlotte took off the final newspaper wrapping and handed the vase to Nell.

It really wasn't nearly so bad as Nell had feared, although it was a queer shade of red she had never seen before. Still, red wasn't as awful as purple.

"Your Uncle Russell always called it his ox-blood vase. Unpleasant notion of his, wasn't it?" Aunt Charlotte continued placidly.

"*Sang de bœuf!*" cried Nell, who had been studying faithfully about pottery, even if she hadn't recognized the specimen. "Oh, Jerry, darling, can it really be?"

"Well, upon my soul!" Jerry's voice showed how keen was his pleasure. "If that isn't the very old vase that I got a spanking for meddling with when I was a kid! I never expected to see the day when I'd own it. Aunt Charlotte, this is an important day in my life." He carefully set the vase back in its old-time place in the niche.

"Make yourself at home, ox-blood!" he announced. "The place is yours!"

A shaft of light struck the vase, and the whole room seemed to focus on its rich, luscious color.

"Your uncle must have set a lot of store by it," Aunt Charlotte continued, "because he willed the full set of pink luster, with only one cup broken and one saucer chipped, to the sister he didn't get on with, and to my mother, who was his favorite sister, he willed that vase. That shows what he thought of it. Mother put it away in her china closet, and I've always done the same, except when this young man went after it, and for once in his days got the good whaling he deserved."

"Looks as if I cracked it a little," Jerry said with a grin, which deepened into a laugh when Nell took him seriously and explained:

"Oh, no, Jerry. That's what the books call 'barely perceptible crackle,' not cracks! Doesn't it look wonderful in its niche?"

"It does look pretty up there—mighty pretty," Aunt Charlotte replied, "if one can get the mind shed of that butcher shop notion of Uncle Russell's."

"He didn't originate the term," Nell began to explain eagerly, but a warning glance from Jerry indicated that Aunt Charlotte didn't like to have her statements challenged, so she went on hurriedly: "You are mighty generous to give it to us. Jerry and I are simply crazy over it."

"Tastes differ, but I'm glad you're pleased, child," the aged lady admitted.

Aunt Charlotte was vastly pleased herself. She had given her nephew and his wife a present which enchanted them, without having to disturb her snug little balance in the bank.

When Aunt Charlotte had gone to her room for a nap, Nell said meditatively to Jerry:

"From something my Aunt Jean said, or maybe it was the way she looked, I've got a hunch she is going to bring us some-

thing for the niche. Wouldn't it be dreadful if she did? For our *sang de bœuf* vase absolutely belongs there. I can see now why the Sheffield vase looked ordinary and parvenu. As you are Aunt Charlotte's only nephew, you can't hurt the old dear's feelings, but Aunt Jean is my very favorite aunt, and I just can't hurt hers, either."

"Your Aunt Jean isn't terrifying, Nell," Jerry remarked generously.

"You'll be keen for her, Jerry, when you know her better; she's so different from other people. She's vivid, somehow, like a girl who has good times. We'll keep Uncle Russell's vase in the niche always, except when Aunt Jean comes to visit us, and then we'll put in hers. But it does seem tricky, doesn't it?"

"Holy smoke, how you do cross bridges ahead of schedule! Probably your aunt will bring you a magenta scarf or a feather boa."

Nell shook her head. "You don't know her well yet. She'll never give me anything messy. And when she made me understand she was going to bring me a present, I knew it would have to be something exquisite."

When the rug arrived, Jerry and Nell were proud prophets, for Jerry had said it wouldn't be a vase, and Nell had predicted it would be "something exquisite," and the Oriental rug merited the term. Aunt Charlotte thought it looked slightly faded, and there was a worn place in it—so probably Nell's aunt had picked it up secondhand at a bargain—but she held her peace.

To wise Jean Clinton the lost vase was ancient history, gone into the place of discarded memories. Mr. Clinton had telephoned the "trash man" to search the dump pile to learn if by any miraculous chance the vase had escaped injury.

The man reported that there "wasn't no sign of a vase there, because the kids swoop down every time things are dumped out, trying to find broken chiny and such for their playhouses." Near the dump was an oak grove where the mill children used the exposed roots of trees for their playhouses, making walks and gardens bordered with bits of glass. The man searched there, too, but no vestige of the vase was to be found.

IV

It was little Sally Kimball who had spied the bundle of excelsior, and trudged off to

a quiet place to open it. Here was a treasure-trove!

It was a nice vase, broken in two, but if one could stick it together—what a perfectly gorg'us Christmas present it would make for mother! It was bigger than the vases in the ten-cent store.

If one just had money to buy glue! One used to have five cents 'most any time when daddy was home, but poor daddy had been put in jail, although he was perfectly innocent, so mother had to work in the factory.

Mums had told daddy to stay away from that pool room crowd, but daddy hadn't minded her, and now he was orful sorry, and he told her he was done for keeps when he got back home again—but that didn't give Sally five cents now. She screwed up her face, thinking hard, and wondered if the man at the mill store wouldn't give her just a little glue.

Sally started to cross the street, oblivious to everything but her new possession. She did not hear the honk of a small motor car, and its driver had to swerve sharply to avoid her, nearly going into the curbstone. He called out with some heat: "Watch your step! Trying to kill yourself? Shame on you!"

The girl with him expostulated gently: "Don't scold her, darling. See, the poor little thing has broken her vase. Stop a minute."

"It was all busted up when I found it on the dump pile," Sally explained confidently. Her hair was sandy, and her up-turned nose freckled, but there was an engaging friendliness about the child. "Have you got any glue, mister, so's I could mend it? Then it 'd do to give mums for Christmas."

"Hop right in, and maybe we can find your mums a whole one," the young man invited.

The girl's eyes beamed on him with pride and approbation. Surely the youth was thereby rewarded for his kindly impulse, as he and the girl had been engaged exactly three days.

Sally needed no second invitation. She directed them to the ten-cent store, and spent the whole silver dollar that the young man provided, and with an efficiency which surprised her new friends. Fifty cents went into new kitchen ware, ten cents for an iridescent vase of orange-colored glass, and there was still enough left for two blue

and white cups and saucers, and an artificial flower to pin on her mother's coat for state occasions.

"Mums won't burn her hand on that ole coffeepot or drink out of cracked cups this Christmas," Sally gloated. "And daddy's new cup 'll be there as soon as he gets home. And won't mums look like the rich folks in the movies, with a flower stuck in her coat! Look at it, lady, ain't it swell?"

In the meantime the two grown-ups had done some shopping on their own account, happy choosings with laughing consultations. Perhaps deep in their hearts was the thought of the magical days ahead when they would be doing Christmas shopping for their own children.

The girl was going to keep on teaching school until June, in order to save money for her trousseau, and the youth had been promised a promotion the first of the year, so they were to be married in the summer time. Actually to live together in a little flat of their own—it seemed too miraculous for belief!

They took Sally back to within a block of her home, telling her to hide away her gifts and to turn over the other packages to her mother.

"I bet they's presents for me," Sally remarked, hopefully. "I won't peek, but can I look at mums' right after she opens 'em? I can tell lots that way."

The girl gave laughing permission. Any of her school children would have explained that she was "easy," but they would have said it affectionately.

"Don't you want your broken vase, Sally?" she asked. She picked up the broken pieces, put them together, and for the first time regarded the vase. "Why, it's beautiful!"

"That ole thing!" Sally said with superb scorn. "I've got mums a brand new vase." Then a happy thought came to her, and she added eagerly:

"If you think it's nice, you take it for your Christmas gift—you and your husband, too."

The girl was touched and pleased, and the young man thought it funny and sweet and dear of her to keep an old broken vase because a poor child gave it to her.

"I like it," the girl declared, thoughtfully. "Somehow I like it better than any vase I ever saw in my life. We'll put it in our own home, and keep it always, be-

cause it's the very first thing ever given us together."

Her voice grew softer. "I can't explain, but doesn't the shape of it rest your eyes somehow? And the color—even on a cold, sleety day like this. Wouldn't the color make you feel that spring was on the way?"

The youth patted her arm. He loved that quick, breathless look of her, as if uplifted by sudden ecstasy—like that April day when they had come upon a meadow where violets seemed fairly romping; or last week when the sun struck the snow crystals on a clump of firs. What unimportant little things pleased her!

"We'll make the vase the keynote of our room, and we won't put in anything that isn't right with it," she went on. "I don't mind a little bareness—do you?—but I do hate to live with ugly things. Mother wants to fix her own room with new wicker and cretonne by the time we are married, and she has given me the old walnut pieces. Her grandfather was a cabinetmaker, and he made them with his own hands, and they're so honest and dignified."

This time the young man chuckled in spite of himself. "Honest and dignified"

were such funny words to apply to somewhat battered furniture!

V

So everybody concerned had the Christmas feeling! Jerry and Nell thought themselves the two luckiest people in the world, with the niche so admirably filled, and the wine-red rug shimmering on the floor.

Aunt Charlotte experienced the dual satisfaction of giving and keeping, for the bank balance was undisturbed. Mums and Sally had all those mysterious packages to open until their shabby room took on the radiance of yuletide joy.

The young man was loyally sure the Prince of Wales would have envied the dozen handkerchiefs the girl had hemstitched and monogrammed for him, and she had the epochal thrill of seeing an engagement ring sparkle on her slim finger.

And surely the vase, so skillfully patched that no cracks showed, had found the very home where it belonged. The lustered arabesques about the base were interlaced with this inscription in a language no longer written or spoken:

"Tarry thou with her to whom the gods have given the love of beauty."

SONS OF THE NEW WEST

Sons of the new West, the bright hills still glisten,
The trails of enchantment still call us away;
Cattle still graze on our emerald mesas,
Ponies still fret to be off with the day.
Gold there is still in the depths of our mountains
Inviting us, shining, just under the clay.

The desert still stretches in cactus and greasewood,
The forests still tower in cyprus and pine;
Cañons still wait for us, cool and refreshing,
Where sycamores rise, still entangled with vine.
And the wind in the peaks and the breeze in the valleys
Still is as tonic and magic as wine.

Ours is a land that can never be conquered,
Though cities arise in the midst of the plain;
Though rivers come down with the snows of the winter
To cover the desert with wide fields of grain.
Whatever man tames can be only a little,
The West is too wide to be fettered domain.

Sons of the West that is golden in legend,
The hills and the plains still shine in the sun;
Ours is a heritage, brilliant with challenge:
The work that our fathers had only begun . . .
And as long as the desert shall stretch to the mountains
All the deeds of adventure will never be done.

H. A. Woodbury

The Bum

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—THIS HUMAN DERELICT, A VERITABLE FOOTBALL OF FATE, IS CARRIED TO A TRIUMPHANT TOUCHDOWN ACROSS THE GOAL LINE OF HAPPINESS

By Charles K. Harris

HE slouched on the park bench in the generally accepted attitude of bums. His clothes were the last word in attire for vagabondage, and the bleak, melancholy look of his eyes would have charmed a movie director looking for the Perfect Bum. Only the beery glaze in the eyes was lacking; he was a sober loafer.

Dully he watched the group at the other end of his bench—a pathetic enough little picture, consisting, as it did, of a gentle old chap, a little blind girl, feeding half a dozen greedy park squirrels. That they were poor, he could see; but their poverty was rungs above his in the tapering ladder. Theirs was the pitiful, law-abiding poverty of people who have just not quite enough, but make it do.

For lack of other occupation, he watched the child coaxing the squirrels with peanuts, and pretty chirping sounds. A peanut rolled his way, and he furtively palmed and ate it.

It was a delicious peanut, fragrant and roasted to a turn; but the Bum, for some queer reason, flushed, shamed, it would seem, at depriving a child of her joy, or a squirrel of his lunch. A delicate ethical point, this, but who shall say what goes on in the mind of a bum?

The old man rose, bent and crippled, leaning upon his stick. "Time now, Nanette," he said. "We've food to buy before we go home."

"Oh, G. F., I'm not nearly ready—I've half the peanuts left." The Bum darted a quick glance of hope at them; perhaps the peanuts would be abandoned on the bench. He was very hungry indeed. Hope died as the child went on.

"Tell you what, G. F., you go for the food, and leave me here. I won't move till you get back. I promise."

The old man hesitated, scanning the eager little face with infinite tenderness.

"There's not a thing to worry about," she went on briskly. "Don't think I can't take care of myself, just on account of my old eyes." The child had none of the sensitiveness of many blind people.

"Well, I won't be long," he said, and, with a pat on her shoulder, he hobbled off.

The feeding went on until one squirrel, greedier than his fellows, made a dash for the source of supplies. The peanuts showered over the path, and rolled in all directions. Tears sprang to the child's eyes as she began to grope pitifully for her fallen treasures.

"Here!" said the Bum, gruffly. "Just you sit still. I'll get 'em for you."

The tears vanished.

"Oh! Isn't it wonderful?" she glowed. "Whenever anything horrid happens, there's always some one to help me. It makes it almost nice to be blind."

Unshaven though he was, the man's face looked pleasant when he smiled. "Quite a way o' looking at it," he conceded. "Here you are." To his credit, be it said, he returned every peanut.

"I know by your voice that you're quite a nice man," said the child. "Though of course I can't tell just what you look like, unless you let me use my fingers."

"Go as far as you like."

Little hands fluttered delicately from his pulled-down cap to his stubbly chin. "You need a shave, don't you?" she asked innocently, smilingly.

"Two or three of 'em, I shouldn't wonder, young lady."

"You're very nice looking, I think. I hope you've got blue eyes. They'd go so well with a lovely straight nose like yours."

The Bum took his mind off his appetite, and grinned.

"Do you live around here?" asked the child.

"Right on the spot," he replied.

"You must be wealthy," she decided, "Fifth Avenue's very fashionable. We live way over on First Avenue, but we come here every day for the exercise, and the squirrels."

"Guess again," said the Bum in a low tone. "I'm down and out."

Blank surprise mingled with pity in the little one's face. Even at her early age, she knew the pangs of having been "broke." "But how can you live in this neighborhood?"

"These mild April nights, I'm holding down a Park bench."

"Oh!" she cried, shocked. "You mean you haven't even a home?"

"Not a thing wrong with the bench," he said, airily.

"And I thought we were poor, because we have to live on G. F.'s pension, and be careful about buying bread in the six-cent places, and having peanuts only once a week!"

"The old man your grandfather?"

"Yes. He's all I've got, and I'm all he's got, since the war, when my daddy was killed, and mother died right after."

"Hard lines on a kid who's bli—" He closed his lips on the word.

"Don't mind about saying I'm blind. I don't. It isn't forever, you know. I got it after scarlet fever," she informed him, with a hint of pride in her tone. "And at the hospital, they say I can be operated on some day, and see as well as ever."

"G. F. and I have a blind box, and whenever we save any money—like doing without Easter eggs, or stretching G. F.'s tobacco over an extra week—we put it in the box. It's getting fearfully heavy," she sighed, "though it's mostly pennies, and a thousand dollars is a frightful lot."

"You said it."

"Please, I've told you all about us, so now it's your turn."

"Kiddy, the story of my life is a three-word volume: out of work."

"But why don't you get a job?"

The Bum's smile, this time, was not so pleasant. "I didn't get killed in the war, but when I came back, a coupla million other guys came with me, all looking for jobs."

"I didn't have a trade, and I didn't have any references"—his tone was almost a snarl—"so I tramped the streets till my feet were sore, and my clothes got so shabby I didn't even get a look-in. Kid, I've worked on farms in harvest time, and when the crops were in it was good-by, and make yourself scarce; and I've shoveled snow till a hard rain came and took my job away, and the worse my clothes got the fewer my chances."

The tap of old Flynn's stick on the walk roused them from their confidences. The child Nannette went to her grandfather, and burst into a torrent of words, "G. F. darling, there's such a nice man with me, brave and kind, but frightfully poor, and he never had a chance, and he can't get work, and he has no friends, and not even a home, and I just know he's hungry. And please, can we have him for supper?"

The men's eyes met over her head. Old Flynn held out his hand, "Sure, it's glad I'll be if you'll share our bite of supper. And what might your name be?"

The bum shook hands with the sturdy old Irish-American citizen. He tried to recall the last time he had shaken a decent man's hand.

"Call me George," he said, as his voice cracked like a fifteen-year-old boy's.

"Well, we'd best be moving," said Flynn. "There's rain in the air, as my old knee tells me."

The odd trio reached First Avenue when the first drops fell. To the Bum, Flynn's big top-floor room, with its tiny alcove for Nannette's cot, was palatial; to his ravenous appetite, the coffee and sausages, a nearly painful rapture.

At eight o'clock, after helping clear the dishes away, he rose to go. But Nannette and old Flynn were loud in their protestations against this move.

"Oh, George, the park benches will be all wet. You mustn't go!"

"Hark, man, to the rain on the roof! Bed yourself down in the corner, and I'll get you out a blanket."

The Bum smiled. "You're a coupla infants. You need a nurse. How do you know I won't murder the two of you, and lift the blind-box?" he said.

Nannette crowed with laughter; and old Flynn replied, "I'll chance it, lad. You've got straight-looking eyes."

In the bleak, steady rain, the next morning, the Bum left them, to go back to his unequal contest with life. The Flynn's cheering wishes of luck faded into unreality as he scanned the boards on Sixth Avenue for places where there was "Help Wanted, Male."

Indeed, the whole incident began to take on the aspect of a dream in the Bum's mind, with the friendliness too good to be true, the Flynn's too good to be human.

II

To Herbert Lee, sitting in the immense window of the Fifth Avenue Club, the chill April rain gave an added zest to life. The wind, driving the rain slantwise, like lances, afforded him an extra sense of comfort from the warmth of the huge log fire behind him.

The jostling umbrellas floating past somehow increased the pleasant tang of his whisky and soda. Young Jimmy Ames, his partner, entirely free from Lee's "high-hat" attitude, sat scanning the sporting page in the fading light.

"Looks a pipe for Prince Hal to-morrow," he said. "I'll bet you two to one he wins by ten lengths."

Lee smiled, a cool, satirical smile. "You and your bets, Jimmy. Is the word ever off your lips?"

"Good old Anglo-Saxon word," murmured Jimmy, unabashed.

"Betting is the pastime of morons—and a dangerous one at that."

"Not when you win," countered Jimmy, with a wide grin. "And if you'll notice, I nearly always win."

"But the pernicious principle, Jimmy—"

"Pernicious, nothing. A little uncertainty adds spice to life."

"A little, I grant you. But it's a mania with you. A man can't talk to you for five minutes without your eternal 'I bet you.' You've bet with every soul you know on every conceivable proposition in the world, from the state of to-morrow's weather to the state of next month's market."

"Well, where's the harm, I'd like to know?"

"Possibly none, except for the effect it has on your character."

"Character be blown."

"And on your future."

"My—future?"

"My dear Jimmy, for some incomprehensible reason I'm rather fond of you. And I hate to see you throwing away your chances of a brilliant future and a happy marriage on account of your ridiculous betting habits."

"I know there's no great harm in it, but your uncle and Marion Wayne feel otherwise. Do you realize, Jimmy, that you'll lose that girl if you don't pull up?"

"Oh, I know Marion chews the rag a bit about my gambling, but she's too fond of me to break off for such a silly reason." Lee shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm not so sure. I only know that she asked me seriously, only yesterday, to see what I could do with you, to use my influence to make you cut betting out. Her exact words were, 'Of course, Jimmy's a dear, and I love him, but I won't marry a—sort of bookmaker. It's either his stupid old betting or—me.' So there you are. It's up to you, Jimmy."

Jimmy stared gloomily out of the window for a few moments.

"I know," he replied. "She's said that sort of thing to me, too. But I don't believe she meant it."

"She meant it, all right."

"Well, of course, I can give it up any time I like."

Lee favored him with a cynical chuckle.

"That's what they all say," he murmured wearily.

"You think I can't do it?" said Jimmy hotly. "I bet you a hundred—"

Lee's laugh was so genuine that Jimmy perforce had to join him.

"Oh, hang betting!" said Jimmy.

"Let's drop the subject."

"And drop the betting, Jimmy. Take my advice."

Lee's glance, idly raking the wet streets, fell on a man at the curb—a sodden, hopeless figure of misery, with cap pulled down, and coat collar turned up against the driving spears of rain.

"Look at that wretched creature out there, Jimmy. Let him be an object lesson to you. Probably a race-track tout, once. He's exactly the type."

"Who knows?" mused Jimmy. "He might have been a gentleman in his day."

Lee shuddered fastidiously.

"Never, Jimmy. Gentlemen may lose their money, but not their self-respect. No gentleman would parade himself so ob-

scenely in the public eye. He'd creep out of sight, and die like a—gentleman."

"Not so sure, Herb. Just let you and me lose every button we've got, and sink down to the dregs, without a roof or a penny or a crust, and I don't believe we'd exactly shine with gentlemanliness. Judy O'Grady, and the Colonel's lady, you know—"

Lee's tone showed a sort of offended irritation as he replied:

"My dear Jimmy, I appreciate the delicate compliment you pay me, but why couple me with that—object out there?"

Jimmy laughed.

"Don't get waxy, old boy. I'm not exactly coupling you with him. I only say, given certain circumstances, you and I might grow like him; and I'll go so far as to add that, given certain other circumstances, he could be turned into as perfect a flower of gentility as our decorative selves."

"Not in a thousand years!" scoffed Lee.

"Six months would turn the trick," said Jimmy.

"Rubbish! Water seeks its own level, and dregs always sink to the bottom."

An argument, a disagreement, always stiffened Jimmy's positiveness into downright obstinacy.

"I tell you I could take that poor devil," he said, "and with care, and training, and money, turn him into one of us in six months."

"Never!" said Lee.

"I say yes. Do you want to bet I can't."

Lee's eyes narrowed. He hesitated. It occurred to him that a stringent overdose of Jimmy's own medicine might cure him, where all else had failed.

"Done, Jimmy!" he said quietly. "I'll bet you ten thousand dollars that you can't."

"Ten thou—" Jimmy's jaw dropped. Prosperous as both men were, ten thousand dollars was, nevertheless, a considerable sum of money. Jimmy's everlasting wagers usually ranged from five to a hundred dollars.

"Ten thousand dollars!" Lee rapped out. "Not a penny less! Big undertakings should have big rewards. It'll cost you a pretty penny in bath soap alone to clean your protégé up. Are you game?"

Jimmy's jaw set. His idle speculations

about the loafer at the curb had taken an unexpectedly serious turn. He was hardly prepared to put his theories to the test, and burden himself with a bum to settle an argument; but Lee's quizzical smile was not to be borne by a man of Jimmy's independent disposition.

"Am I game?" he said. "I'll say I am! And it's going to cost you ten grand, Herby, my boy."

The Bum, chilled to the marrow, and sick in soul, was at the end of things. All day long his bitter search for work had gone on. He had pleaded at one agency for the job of dishwasher as if his life depended on it, only to be told that they didn't want scarecrows, and to get to hell out before he was thrown out.

He had begged like one inspired for the supreme privilege of parading the streets as a sandwich man, only to see the job given to an older man on the ground that he was young enough to find other work.

Toward dusk he had wandered over to Fifth Avenue, with a vague idea of begging a few cents from the passers-by. And then he discovered a strange thing: he could not beg.

Sunk though he was to the lowest scale in the human gamut, he found that the further abasement of begging, whining to utter strangers of his needs, was impossible. Some queer corner of his soul revolted against this last step.

He stood, shivering, with miserable eyes turned toward the passing traffic. Great shining cars slipped by, splashing him with unconscious cruelty. With a dreary indifference, the Bum decided to throw himself under one of the cars, and end his travesty of a life. It seemed so simple and satisfying a way out, that he felt surprised that he had not thought of it long ago.

He looked down the avenue, to pick out a heavy and briskly-moving car; he wanted the job done thoroughly. He found, immediately, the very thing.

A massive limousine, traveling at a smart rate, was bearing down upon him. He stood, poised, at the curb, waiting till the last possible moment for his plunge, so that the chauffeur would have no time to swerve and bungle the job. On it came, the rain spouting from under its whining tires.

Some one tapped him on the shoulder. He started like a nervous horse, turned,

and found himself face to face with an august person wearing much gold lace.

"You're to come this way," said the Presence, and led the way, with uplifted nose, toward the club's exclusive portals.

Dazed, almost weak-minded with physical misery, the Bum followed him up the wide steps without any thought of demurring; nothing could make things worse for him than they were.

At the door, the Presence handed him over to a lesser personage, but still of august mien. "Mr. Lee says you're to take this to one of the private sitting rooms, and feed it, and warm it, Bill. You'd best hold your nose."

The Bum followed the second glorified minion down a long, soft-carpeted hall, and into a snug, warmly-furnished room. The minion vanished, and soon reappeared, flanked by a third, who carried an immense and steaming tray.

"Feed your face," said Bill, the haughty. "Those are the orders."

As in a fog, the Bum seated himself before the splendid service, dreamily shook open the large linen napkin, and set to. Oddly enough, he did not wolf the food.

Hungry as he was, he went at it, slowly, gingerly, as if he feared that a sudden movement might wake him up, and dispel the dream. Through the whole meal he did not utter a word.

When he had finished, the waiter silently disappeared with the tray, just as Bill ushered in Lee and Jimmy Ames. Bill withdrew, and closed the door. The Bum arose, and faced the two men silently. There was a rather awkward pause, which Jimmy broke characteristically.

"Smoke?" he said, and offered his cigarette case. The Bum took a cigarette, and a light.

"Suppose we sit down," said Jimmy, with a strained attempt at ease. They all sat down about the small table. Lee cleared his throat.

"No doubt you are wondering why you are here, my good man," said Lee. "The fact is, we have a proposition to make to you."

For the first time the Bum spoke.

"Who do you want me to kill?"

Jimmy gave a shout of laughter, and the atmosphere cleared.

"We don't want you to kill any one," said Jimmy, "but we do want your co-operation in an experiment."

"Surgeons, are you?" asked the Bum. Jimmy grinned as he shook his head.

"No, this is a funny proposition. It's like this: my friend here made a bet with me that I can't turn you into a gentleman in six months. I say I can. What do you say?"

A wave of color spread slowly over the Bum's face. Jimmy thought it was anger, and braced himself for a row. But the flush faded, and the man's frown seemed only one of bewilderment.

"Let me get this straight," he said.

"Sure," said Jimmy, encouraged. "All you have to do is to put yourself in my hands. I'll take you home, clothe you, feed you, and teach you how to act in public. At the end of six months, if you're a bright little lad, you ought to be fit to pass as a gentleman. If you do, I win my bet. If you don't, I lose. In either case, you get a thousand dollars. How does it strike you?"

"Where's the catch?" asked the Bum.

"No catch to it; only, of course, you've got to disappear when the experiment's over, and promise never to make any use afterward of the acquaintances you make while you're my—guest."

"Fair enough," said the Bum. "You're on, mister."

Lee, drawing up an informal contract, turned to him.

"What's your name?"

"Call me George," said the Bum.

They all signed the agreement, which Lee folded and put in his pocket.

"Well, Jimmy," he said, ironically, "much as I regret leaving George's fascinating society, I advise you to begin your instruction without an instant's delay. You'll need all the time there is. And I highly recommend a strong disinfectant at the outset of the campaign. Good night."

The Bum's slow flush rose again, and Jimmy shot a resentful glance at Lee's departing figure. As a matter of fact, Jimmy's own impulse had been to head straight for a Turkish bath, but Lee's remark put his back up, and sent him flying in defense of the poor creature beside him. He felt that he must somehow make amends for Lee's insult, and this he did by driving straight to his flat with the Bum.

Jimmy's man, Cato, took in the extraordinary visitor without batting an eyelash of his little Oriental eyes. But when Jimmy gave him orders to clean up the

Bum, Cato murmured respectfully but doubtfully:

"Think no can do."

III

HOWEVER, when he ushered the Bum into the living room, an hour later, Jimmy acknowledged that he had worked with Japanese thoroughness.

The Bum, bathed, shaved, and attired in a suit of Jimmy's, appeared to be a not unprepossessing man of about thirty, with tawny hair, weather-beaten and rather hollow cheeks, and clear blue eyes. His lean, hard-bitten frame scarcely filled out Jimmy's clothes, but he was not at all impossible material to work on.

The most glaring fault of his make-up was his tendency to shrink together, with high-raised shoulders, and ducked head, as if he were permanently chilly, and apologetically trying to escape the notice of his fellows. Jimmy eyed him with appraising, friendly eyes.

"Not a bit bad. In fact, a whole lot better than I expected. I never would have known you, George. But you must get rid of that servile pose of yours. Take your hands out of your pockets, and straighten your shoulders."

The Bum complied awkwardly, and with his ever-ready flush. Jimmy added kindly:

"Now, understand, George, I'll have to correct you in a thousand things, but there's no offense meant. It's simply that the external gestures of my world differ a bit from yours. I expect, if I wanted to be a bum, you'd have your hands full showing me the proper caper."

George actually achieved a grin.

"I wouldn't wonder, Mr. Ames, if we aren't going to have a bit of fun out of this."

"Good. I'm glad you take it that way. And that reminds me—if you're George to me, I'd best be Jimmy to you, for the sake of appearances."

"Right-o—Jimmy."

The Bum slept badly that night. His bed was too comfortable.

The next day was one of details. It began with careful instructions at breakfast as to the use of spoons and forks, in which the Bum proved an apt and docile pupil. As it was Saturday, Jimmy gave up his half holiday golf, and took George to his tailor.

With a careless word to the effect that

his friend had lost his luggage in transit from Havana, Jimmy ordered day and evening clothes, to be turned out at express speed. Shooks Brothers and Hulka's filled in the accessories.

As the expenditures kept piling up, it must be confessed that Jimmy silently called himself several kinds of an idiot to foot such a steep bill for the sake of a ridiculous whim. But with characteristic optimism, he assured himself that it was going to give him a creative thrill to refashion this scrapped bit of humanity.

And, besides, if he worked hard enough, and successfully enough, it would be Lee who would pay in the end. The incidental expenses were nothing compared to the ten-thousand-dollar bet.

The odd part of the whole business was, that not once, during their whole intercourse, did Jimmy question the Bum's honesty. It never crossed his somewhat guileless mind that, given favorable opportunity, George might collect everything of value he could lay his hands on, and light out.

In fact, finding that the Bum had driven an army Dodge in France, he went so far as to allow him the use of his roadster, while he—Jimmy—was at the office.

One of George's first expeditions in the smartly turned out car was a visit to the Flynns. He told them the turn his fortune had taken, while they listened with breathless interest. Nannette declared it was far better than a fairy tale, because it added truth to its other fascinating particulars.

But old Flynn shook his head doubtfully, and expressed the opinion that it was an unnatural business, and no good could come of it. The Bum took Nannette for a long ride, the first of many, which delighted her. She loved to feel the rush of cold air on her cheeks, and the smell of the green when they got out into the country.

During the weeks of the Bum's novitiate, Jimmy spent practically all his free time with him, as guide, philosopher, and—queerly enough—friend; for an odd liking had sprung up between these two strangely assorted housemates.

Jimmy's year at the front stood him in good stead. The hail-fellow democracy which had existed in France between him and his buddy—a Herculean truck driver—he extended now to George. His early definite instructions as to the usages of society, the details of table manners, and

the proper way to enter a room, began to give place to friendly discussions as to the ethics of one's behavior in certain given circumstances.

Jimmy found the Bum receptive and intelligent, and felt that, somehow, the poor creature's soul was expanding, under his companionship, as well as his body. George's early bitterness was melting, and he was allowing his natural attributes fuller play. And to Jimmy's surprise, he discovered that this bit of life's flotsam had a sort of personality, a humorous charm, that captured him.

"Damn it," he said to himself, "I like the chap!"

Through this whole period he refused to let Lee visit him, or see his protégé, explaining that he preferred to let the Bum burst upon him in all his glory. Lee was skeptical and ironic, but contented himself with inquiring from time to time how Jimmy's Frankenstein was getting on.

What went on in Cato's active mind, no one knew. But it was an odd fact that from the first, in spite of having "cleaned up" George on his initial appearance, the little Japanese was unwaveringly deferential and obliging to his master's guest.

Early in September, about five months after the beginning of the experiment, as Jimmy called it, the Bum and his host were sitting, one evening, at dinner in Jimmy's flat. It was raining, a cool refreshing end to a week's muggy heat. Jimmy watched his guest covertly, with a growing excitement. Finally, he burst out:

"Look here, George. D'you know what I think?"

"What?"

"I think you're about ready."

"Ready?" the Bum echoed, puzzled.

"For the public eye. I've been thinking about it for a couple of days, and watching you on the quiet. And I haven't found a single thing wrong. If I know anything at all, you'll go over with a bang."

The Bum looked panic-stricken.

"Oh, Lord!" he exclaimed. "I—can't we wait a bit?"

Jimmy eyed him resentfully.

"Look here! You're not going to funk it at the last minute? That 'd be sweet!"

The Bum hesitated, and then spoke quietly:

"No, I won't funk it. I'll go through with it, and not disgrace you. But, Jimmy—had we better?"

"What d'you mean, 'had we better'?"

"I mean this: isn't it playing pretty low down on the people you've known all your life, to introduce them to a dirty bum, dressed up in borrowed clothes?"

The Bum's remark stung Jimmy. Deep in his own mind he felt this very thing, had felt it all along; but he had thrust it impatiently away from him because it interfered with his plans.

Left to himself, he might, at the very last minute, have given up the game, sent George away unintroduced with his promised one thousand dollars, and paid Lee the bet. But to have the creature of his own making turn on him and act mentor, annoyed him intensely.

Jimmy was a man who never could be ridden on the bit; so now he stifled his conscience in sheer pique, and said gruffly:

"Suppose you leave the ethics end of it to me, George. The important point now is to think up a name for you."

It had been the Bum's idea that it would ease things considerably if he were introduced as an Englishman, and to that end, Jimmy had coached him carefully, in accent and bits of English slang. The two men went into the living room, Jimmy with a frown of concentration on his young face, as he strove to think of a suitable name.

"Oh, hell!" he said, finally. "Pick out your own name," and tossed the Bum a Burke's Peerage. "You might pick a George Something, so we don't get ourselves balled up."

The Bum took the fat volume, rifled its pages, and studied a column for a few moments.

"Here's something," he announced. "George, Viscount Harcourt, son of the Earl of Harcourt."

Jimmy exploded with laughter.

"Nothing small about you, George, I'll say that much. A common or garden honorable is beneath your notice." He considered. "It might be as well, though. Any little flukes would be laid to the eccentricities of the nobility. Go to it."

"Just as you say," answered George.

With a clownish solemnity, Jimmy flicked a drop or two of water from the carafe, upon the Bum's head.

"I hereby christen you, George, Viscount Harcourt, for a short but intense period of time. Come on, Vike, we'll trot around to the club."

Intentionally, he chose a club composed mostly of young men, before whom his protégé would most easily pass muster. And if the worst came to the worst, and George was exposed, it would be simple, in that sportsmanlike environment, to explain the bet and the joke.

At the door of the smoking room he met four young acquaintances, who hailed him with joy.

"Hello, Jimmy Ames! Just our man. We need some poker hands."

Jimmy casually introduced Viscount Harcourt, with a word about his having just arrived in America.

"Perhaps the viscount plays?" suggested one of the group.

It appeared that the viscount did. He said he had been initiated in the national indoor sport on the boat coming over.

"Good! That's six. Jimmy, go ask Carstairs if he wants to join us."

When Jimmy returned with young Carstairs in tow, he found Lee listening with flattering attention to the viscount's first impressions of America. With a superhuman effort, Jimmy managed to control his face, but inwardly he was chortling with the wildest glee.

By a happy chance, Lee had sauntered over to fill in the poker game, and it was one of the group who had introduced him to the Bum. As Jimmy watched Lee's slightly sardonic face at its most cordial, he felt amply repaid for all his efforts and outlay. In passing to the card room, he managed to whisper to George:

"I'll back you. You can keep what you win, and I'll settle if you lose."

George played in excellent luck, and with a sportsmanship that won instant liking for him. He laid four kings on the table without a raise, when Carstairs bet out on a flush.

"A good old Johnny!" whispered Leighton to Lee.

At one o'clock the game broke up, and George cashed in a hundred and ninety dollars. The rain had ceased, and Jimmy and George decided to walk home up the avenue. At the door they found Lee at their elbow, loath to part from the charming sprig of nobility.

"Walking?" he said. "Then I believe I'll join you."

The avenue, with its necklace of lights, stretched before them, in its inimitable splendor.

"How does Fifth Avenue impress you, viscount?" asked Lee, almost deferentially.

"A beautiful street—for the rich," replied George, dryly.

"Don't tell me you're a socialist, viscount!" Lee laughed, gayly. "A man of your position."

"No, hardly that," said George. "But things must be all wrong, somehow, when a man can fall so low as to sell himself to you for the sake of a silly bet. It gets me, rather."

Annoyed, Lee turned to Jimmy.

"You've violated our contract by telling," he said. "The secret was to be among the three of us."

"It still is," murmured Jimmy, mildly. "Lee, I guess I've won the bet."

For a moment Lee was speechless; then a cold fury seized him. To fool the public in the abstract was one thing; to have been caught himself, fawning delightedly on the Bum, quite another.

"Do you think," he said finally, in a voice of ice, "that it was quite playing the game to make a fool of me?"

"I wasn't trying to," said Jimmy, repentantly, but with an irrepressible twinkle. "I only thought, if George passed the test of your eagle eye, that 'd be enough to win me the bet. How was I to know you'd fall so very hard for his lordship?"

"I hardly gave him a moment's attention," said Lee, with an absurd effort to restore his self-esteem. "Now that I notice him carefully, I can see how very far he is from the real thing."

Jimmy turned his splutter of laughter into a cough. After all, Lee was his friend, and it had been rather a rotten trick to take such a rise out of him.

"Well, Herb," he asked, "do I win the bet?"

"Certainly not—yet."

"But even if you weren't fooled," Jimmy swallowed a grin, "the chaps at the club were. Doesn't that fill the bill?"

A few indiscriminate young sports over a poker table. That's not a real test," said Lee.

"Well, you're the doctor. What's the dose?"

"Your uncle is giving a dinner dance for Marion out at Redwood, I believe," said Lee, with malicious calm.

Jimmy flushed. His *fiancée* was his uncle's ward, and very dear to both of them. Jimmy had had no compunctions

about introducing the Bum to his men friends, but to foist him on Marion went against the grain. Besides, his uncle, John Ames, was a sort of international figure, and knew English society quite as well as the Long Island colony where he spent his summers.

He was a rather rigid man, and Jimmy knew that he would never forgive a practical joke of such questionable taste. And it seemed inevitable that the trick would be discovered. Jimmy cursed himself for letting George use a real name, and probably a prominent one. He was on the point of calling the game off, and paying the bet, when Lee's voice broke in on his gloomy meditations.

"Afraid?" Lee mocked.

The stubborn streak in Jimmy rose like a trout to a fly.

"I am not," he said. "If that's your test, we're on."

IV

JIMMY, the Bum, and Cato motored down to Huntington on Saturday for the week-end, arriving at Redwood just in time to dress for dinner. Jimmy piloted George straight upstairs without meeting his uncle, and immediately sent Cato for a stiff drink.

"My Lord, I'm in a funk," he muttered, nervously. "This thing's getting away from me. I'm scared, George."

"No need to be. I shan't talk much, and in the mob I'll get away with it."

"But my uncle knows English society like a book. He'll catch you out in the first inning."

"Not so sure. I've been reading all about these Harcourt Johnnies in your 'Historic English Families,' and I've got my little lesson pat."

"Yes, but it's going to be hell, you doing the son of the earl, with Lee looking on with a sardonic smile."

George started.

"Is he going to be here?"

"With bells on. He's stopping next door with the Lindsays."

"That big place we passed coming down?"

"Yes, 'The Roses.' Lee's hoping to hang his hat up there permanently some day."

"Gosh, I can't imagine a fish like Mr. Lee being in love or engaged."

"He's in love, all right, but not engaged

—yet. If you want a real honest-to-God fish, Helen Lindsay's the king-pin. Pretty as paint, a darn good pal, but nix on the come-hither.

"Helen's had the option on every man I know, pretty near, and she politely but firmly lets it lapse, one hundred per cent. She's a whale of a girl, but if she goes on as she has done, she'll be left high and dry in Spinster Row."

The meeting with John Ames passed off well. Totally unsuspecting, the polished old gentleman expressed his delight at meeting the son of his old friend.

"Not that I've seen your dear old father in thirty years, but there was a time at Cambridge when we were nearly sent down together for some devilment or other." He laughed softly at the reminiscence.

"I understand his London house has not been opened for years, and he spends all his time at his place in Devonshire—"

"Northumberland, sir," put in the Bum.

"Northumberland, of course. Some out-of-the-way county, I knew it was. He used to be a great collector of ivories, I seem to remember."

"Snuffboxes, sir," amended the Bum.

"Yes, yes. Enamels, and so on. Well, my boy, I shan't keep you. Jimmy, introduce the viscount to Helen; I believe he's to take her in."

As the two young men threaded their way through the crowded drawing-room—the dinner was for fifty—Jimmy turned to the Bum with the light of admiration in his eye.

"By the Lord, George, you're a living wonder!"

"Why? I told you I had it all pat out of the book."

"But your tone was great. And what luck we're playing in! Suppose the old Harcourt Johnny had been a figure in London society, and his son, the viscount, too. Where should we have been, then, I ask you? Well, don't let's be too cocky. Mind your p's and q's with Helen Lindsay, and don't talk much."

Sitting in a straight, high-backed dark chair, which formed a fitting background for her glowing beauty, Helen Lindsay was listening with cool, grave attention to Lee, as he leaned toward her. Jimmy, with the Bum in tow, broke in:

"Hello, Helen. I want you to meet my friend, Viscount Harcourt. George, Miss Lindsay."

The Bum bowed, speechless. Her beauty, her serene, remote air of a princess, and her lovely slow smile, floored him like a knock-out blow. He could not think that any one so exquisite, so utterly perfect, could be real, much less be receiving him on equal terms. Then he caught Lee's satirical eye upon him, and pulled himself together.

"I believe I'm taking you in, Miss Lindsay," he said, with as easy a smile as he could muster. "But I didn't know my luck until now."

The princess was pleased to smile graciously. The smile infuriated Lee. To see the woman he loved wasting one of her smiles, or even one instant of her attention, on a thing like the Bum! He visualized the rainy evening when he had first caught sight of the creature, filthy, haggard, and cringing. The whole situation was utterly impossible.

He'd ask Jimmy to cry off the bet, though he rather imagined that Jimmy wouldn't. And ten thousand dollars was a considerable sum of money—just now. Although he and Jimmy were partners, he himself had lately made a couple of unwise investments, he called them—and with the market acting so feverish, he needed all the spare cash he could lay his hands on at present. Still, he needn't crucify himself by standing by and watching Helen and the Bum exchange friendly laughing small talk.

But, try as he would, he could not take his eyes off them during dinner, as they sat, heads bent to each other, the Bum's smooth tawny hair inclining toward Helen's rebellious blue-black waves. They seemed to have an immense lot to say to each other, he thought, savagely.

They appeared hardly aware that they were not alone at the table, Helen frankly turning her shoulder to the man on the other side of her, and George neglecting his right-hand neighbor shamefully. Once upstairs in the famous blue and gold ballroom, however, Lee felt on his own ground again.

"May I have the first?" he asked Helen.

"I'm sorry, Herbert, I've promised it to the viscount."

"Ah," said Lee, in dangerously silky tones, "does the viscount add dancing to his other gifts?"

"No," said Helen, blandly, "he doesn't dance, but we're going to sit it out in the

conservatory." Helen was a law unto herself. She did as she pleased, and, as Jimmy would have said, she got away with it.

During the evening, she sat out five dances with the Bum, a fact breathlessly noted by all the little intimate summer colony. Had Helen at last fallen for this new man, they asked each other?

For their part, they could hardly blame her—an attractive enough chap, and a viscount, into the bargain. And from a word that old Mr. Ames let fall, they understood that he was no mere wife-and-fortune hunter; the Harcourt acres and rent roll ran into imposing figures.

When Jimmy and the Bum went to bed that night, Jimmy was bubbling over with triumph and glee.

"Did you see poor old Lee's face? He looked like he'd swallowed a persimmon. Ten thousand buckos is no airy tip, thinks little Lee. George, you've been marvelous. I'm proud of you."

Then Jimmy got the surprise of his life. The Bum turned to him a face black with fury, and snapped:

"Well, let me tell you, I'm not proud of you. My Lord, I think you and Lee are two of the meanest cads I ever ran into, and, believe me, I've met some in my day."

Jimmy gasped, and clenched his fists.

"Say that again!" he threatened.

"Oh, beat me up," said the Bum, wearily. His anger suddenly left him, only his white moody face showed some inward strain. Jimmy dropped his hands, and came over to him.

"What's wrong, George?" he asked kindly.

"Wrong? The whole damned outfit," said the Bum, dully. "I swear to Heaven, you and Lee don't seem to have a conscience. For the sake of a picayune bet, you make fools of your relations and friends, and let them meet a common bum they wouldn't spit at, if they knew. And to you, I'm nothing but a—thing, without feelings, without guts—what the hell do you care where I get off?"

"George, I'm sorry. I do forget at times that this masquerade isn't as funny to you as it is to me, but I don't mean any harm—I wouldn't hurt you for the world. Why, damn it, I like you."

The Bum looked at him steadily.

"So does Helen Lindsay," he said slowly, meaningly.

"What the deuce—"

"You think I'm a conceited puppy for saying that, don't you? Well—it's true. She likes me, and if I'm with her long enough, I could make her care for me."

Jimmy gave a shout of laughter, kindly but heartily.

"So that's what's eating you? Don't kid yourself, George. That's only Helen's deadly little way with every new man. It's a system. She turns her spiffy eyes and her patented smile on every man she meets, till they think she's ready to fall like a ripe cherry.

"And all that happens is that the poor guy does the falling. I don't blame you for not getting it, first crack out of the box. Better men than you have got all swelled up because Helen gave 'em the treatment. But don't kid yourself that you're about to break a poor innocent girl's heart. There ain't no such animal in Helen."

"A lot you know."

"I know, all right, George. I learned it straight from headquarters when I was about twenty. Helen and I have grown up together, and since my day I've seen her hand the frozen mitt to dozens and dozens. But never, in all that time, did she get the ghost of a thrill herself. Just a nice little lukewarm pleasantness is all it means to her."

"Let's suppose for a minute that she might get interested in me—"

"I'm telling you there's not a chance—"

"But suppose—"

"No can do, as Cato says. Helen's the original icicle, and if you have a hunch that you can thaw her out, dream on. Just you go to bed and sleep on your weird scruples, young feller my lad, and hold out all the sugar you want to the lovely Helen—she won't get burned."

But Jimmy, for once, had the wrong dope, as he himself would have put it. He, Marion Wayne, and the Bum spent practically all Sunday at "The Roses," and Helen showed an uncanny skill in arranging tennis matches, which left everybody occupied but herself and George.

Deftly, she maneuvered a long *tête-à-tête*, on the pretext of showing him the grounds, and the famous Lindsay rose arbor, in particular, where Helen's father, tired of cornering the copper market, had applied his very considerable abilities to turning out a perfectly new rose of a faint exquisite mauve color, horticulturally known as "The Blue Rose."

"I expect our little tuppenny grounds look absurd to you," said Helen. "Do tell me about your home."

So the Bum described Castle Harcourt, its ivy-covered towers and battlements, its four-hundred-year-old turf, its yew walk, its monastic ruins—with an authentic ghost—and its deplorable plumbing.

"It is all very beautiful, but its beauty comes from its age," he said, warming to his work. "Here, it is different. There is a sort of trimness, freshness, about your American places that I like. And then the physical comforts!

"One doesn't have to ramble through endless passages to reach one's bedroom, shivering in the hollow chill of the corridors. I do like your central heating, and your glittering baths, and your clever electrical contrivances. I think if we were to lay on electricity at Harcourt, we'd require enough wire to reach from here to Borneo and back."

"I must drive you about and let you see some of our show places," said Helen. They arranged for him to come out from town on Wednesday morning for the purpose. In the Blue Rose Arbor she plucked one of the precious blossoms, and pinned it in his coat.

"I say, you know, ought you?" he protested faintly.

"The Blue Rose is my Cross of Honor," she laughed, "the insignia of my friendship, I call it."

His hand closed over hers as it settled the flower into place.

"Friendship," he said slowly; "friendship will not be enough."

His eyes held hers steadily for a full minute. Then hers fluttered and fell, and her color slowly deepened. She pulled her hand away, and gave a short laugh.

"How absurd we are," she said. "I expect we're both hungry, and it's affecting our sense of humor. Do come along; it must be long past lunch time."

They lunched outdoors in the *patio*, and stood some good-natured ragging about their absence and the presence of the rose in George's buttonhole.

"Viscount," cried Marion, gayly, "I wonder if you know your luck. You go on record as the first man Helen's ever picked a Blue Rose for."

"No, really," replied George, rather blankly. He was like a bemused child, suddenly back to the realities of the

nursery after playing fairyland in the dusk.

"I assure you," went on Marion, "poor Mr. Lee has fished for years for a Blue Rose. Pink, yellow, red, or white, yes; but a blue, never. I can't think how you wangled it. Pure charm, I expect. I wish you'd teach me. I do have such a time keeping Jimmy fascinated."

"It's just possible," Lee broke in, faintly satirical, "that our distinguished visitor absent-mindedly plucked the rose himself, not knowing its exotic value."

Helen faced him with her serene smile.

"No," she said. "I gave it to him."

"And that's that," said Marion, with relish. The thing she liked least about Jimmy was his partner.

V

LEE was dining at Jimmy's flat on the Tuesday following the week-end, for the first time since the Bum's advent. As Cato passed the cocktails, serving George with the others, Lee raised his eyebrows.

"Dear me, Jimmy, so you carry on the farce in private?"

"Eh?" said Jimmy, rather densely. But the Bum understood, and flushed.

"You don't mean," said Lee, "that it—he, I should say—actually eats at your table?"

"I say, look here, Herb—" began Jimmy, much annoyed.

"Still," went on Lee, judicially, "it's not such a bad notion. No need to count the silver if he's under your eye."

George's glass crashed on the tray as he strode forward, but Lee raised a languid hand.

"I do beg you not to come any closer, my good man," he said fastidiously. "My appetite's so easily ruined."

The Bum stood with clenched fists, fighting for control.

"Damn it, Herb, don't be such a rotten sport," cried Jimmy. "Ever since Helen gave him that silly rose, you've had your knife out for him."

"See here, Jimmy," said the Bum, "I've done my share. I've passed all the tests you set me. I've met your friends, your relations, your—ladies. They took me at my face value. I should say you'd won your bet, and that I could disappear according to contract. I'd like to go to-night." He spoke with difficulty, trying to suppress the passion in his voice.

Lee broke in with a contemptuous laugh.

"Veneer wearing thin? Can't keep up the rôle much longer, my dear viscount? Like to pocket your bonus, and run, before you're run out?" His voice changed. "I say—no. You were—leased for six months, and your contract has two weeks to run. You'll see it through, you will, or you don't get a penny. Do you get that?"

"What's the idea?" asked Jimmy. "Are you counting on George's making a break in the next two weeks, after what he's been through?"

As a matter of fact, it was highly inconvenient for Lee to write a ten-thousand-dollar check at the moment, but he was spared an immediate answer. The telephone rang sharply, and Jimmy turned and picked up the receiver.

"Hello—Huntington?—go ahead—yes—yes—Jimmy Ames, speaking— Oh, hello, Helen, how are you? Sure, he's here—" Lee stepped forward. "I'll call him to the phone—" Jimmy turned. "Miss Lindsay wants to talk to you, George."

The three men faced one another, petrified, a comical study in astonishment. Then George picked up the receiver. He did very little talking, but a good deal of listening, while Lee cursed savagely under his breath, and Jimmy appreciated the poetic irony of the situation with a suppressed grin. George hung up the receiver, and turned to the others.

"I'm asking you again to wind up my contract. And I think you'd be wise to do it."

"Threats, dear viscount?" jeered Lee. "Veiled in your delightful English accent? No, my man, you'll do precisely as I've indicated. Two weeks more, or you won't get a cent!"

George shrugged his shoulders, and went to the door.

"Just as you like," he said. "Jimmy, I shan't dine here, and spoil your friend's appetite." With a bow he disappeared.

George took an early train down to Huntington, next morning, to find Helen awaiting him at the station in her flashing yellow Hispano-Suiza roadster. It was a magnificent day, the sky a clean sparkling blue, the air with just a tang of autumnal crispness in it.

"Isn't this heavenly?" said Helen. "I've a huge lunch under the seat, and thought we'd make a day of it."

"Ripping!" said George. "Shall I drive, or you?"

As he took the wheel, he never suspected the immense honor he was receiving. Helen's car was as dear to her as her Blue Roses. She sat beside him in her striped sport frock, chatting cozily, pointing out imposing summer homes, smooth-turfed golf links, and rich, red patches of early autumn woods.

But to George, it was all a blur, a mere background for her lovely head. His heart was pounding far louder than the smooth-running engine under his hand. He answered her, he supposed, adequately, because she made no comment, and showed no surprise. But he was like a creature in a dream, his head spinning, his senses thrilling to her nearness and her beauty.

Toward noon she directed him to turn off the highroad into a lane.

"There's a delightful bit of wood in there," she said, "where we can eat lunch. And I do confess I'm perishing of hunger. Unromantic, isn't it, but I got up at seven to meet your ungodly train."

A highly sophisticated luncheon came out of the well-equipped auto basket, but George could never have told what he ate. After it was over, and the pretty Delft ware repacked in the basket, they wandered along the sun-checked lane under the reddening trees. Suddenly he stopped and faced her.

"Helen," he said, and looked at her. It was the strangest love-making she had ever heard, but she could not mistake that all his heart was in his voice. She met his eyes with a sort of divine courage.

"I believe I'm in love at last," she said slowly. "I've always wondered—and longed for it." He swept her into his arms, his lips on hers. Then he suddenly pushed her away with a sharp exclamation of pain.

"What a wretch I am! Helen—I'm sorry—"

But Helen climbed down from the heights with the greatest ease.

"Wretch?" she laughed. "What nonsense! Don't be so frightfully solemn. Oh, George, isn't it divine to love each other?" She tilted her face provocatively, "Or—perhaps you don't—"

"I adore you," he said thickly, "but—"

"Don't spoil this perfectly good day with 'buts.' Oh, life's delicious! George, I'm happy—really happy—for the first time in my life. I could dance for joy, I

feel as if I'd just come alive. Do you? But perhaps you've loved lots of girls before me?"

"Never!"

"How sweet of you! But you do kiss rather—cleverly, you know."

Her intoxication was impossible to resist. He fell in with her mood until it seemed to them both that more happiness would be exquisite pain. Helen was like a creature mad with joy.

In spite of all the love she had inspired in the past, and had never understood, she was like a newly-awakened being, a naïve child, whose lips and hands gave and gave to the beloved, with no miserly thought of prudence or expediency. And suddenly she turned sparkling eyes to him, laden with a new thought.

"George, I've a most brilliant idea!"

"Yes? What is it, sweet?"

"You won't laugh—or frown?"

"Word of honor!"

"Let's get married—now, to-day—while the bloom's on!"

George's dream diffused before his eyes like fog before the sun.

"It's so divine, this day of ours," she went on. "I can't let it end—and go back to every day, again—you to your train, and I home. I just can't! Please, George!"

"But it's impossible, Helen."

"Nothing's impossible. Why is it?"

"Your parents—"

"They wouldn't care. I do as I like."

"But, consider, my dear. You hardly know me—you've met me three times in your life."

She lifted steadfast eyes to his.

"I love you," she said quietly.

He groaned inwardly.

"What a child she is," he said, tenderly.

"An adorable child, but still a child. What do you know of me?"

"I know that I love you," she repeated.

"But, for all you know, I may be the rankest sort of impostor—a bogus count—a crook—"

"That would be—horrible," she said, still in her quiet tone. "But it wouldn't matter. Oh, my dear, don't you understand that it's you I love—and if you were the poorest wretch in the world—I'd still love you."

He kissed her fingers, and held them to his eyes.

"Lord!" he muttered. "If I only deserved you!"

She turned to go back to the car.

"Well, is it yes?" she asked, mischievously, with one of her piquant lightning changes from solemnity.

"But the details—" he countered.

"Such as—"

"Clothes—"

"Rubbish! I can buy as I go—" she said, magnificently.

"Settlements, lawyers—consents—licenses—witnesses—"

"That's the part I detest, business details that have nothing to do with love—and us. George, it's so simple. It's only thirty miles to town. We'll fly down to City Hall, get a license, and come back and be married in Huntington before six—I must have my darling old Dr. Carew marry me; I've always promised him I would."

"Oh, Helen, it's not wise—believe me, there are reasons—"

She pouted her lips distractingly.

"Very well, George," she said demurely. "Since you won't have me, I suppose I'll have to marry Herbert Lee after all."

All the pent-up bitterness and grudge against Lee rose up to cloud his vision and abate his desire.

"You'll marry no Lee, and nobody but me," he said, and turned the car toward town. Lee had insisted on the extra two weeks; he should have full measure, heaped up and running over. Helen loved him, himself—what were her words? "If you were the poorest wretch in the world—" Well, he was.

He'd put her to the test. Those two, Jimmy and Lee, had used him as a pawn in their cheap game. But the pawn was going to have his little moment before he was swept off the board. Let it cost what it might, it was worth it. He refused to think further, giving himself up to the utter delight of her presence.

At four o'clock they had bought the license, and were on their way uptown to Jimmy's flat. Cato let him in, while Helen waited in the car.

"Look here, Cato. Pack me a week-end bag, will you, as fast as you can."

He flung out of his plus-fours, and into a dark suit, as more befitting the occasion. Cato worked smoothly and swiftly, and was ready to help him on with his coat in five minutes. With hands trembling with excitement, George transferred his money and the license to his coat pocket, under Cato's sharp black eyes.

"You go 'way?" asked Cato.

"Yes—no—I'm not sure. Tell Mr. Ames I'll call him up."

"I tell, mister. Good-by."

"Good-by, Cato." And George dashed out to the waiting car.

Cato, above, peering from the living-room window, saw the yellow Hispano-Suiza and its occupant. His sloe eyes narrowed; he shook his small black pate, and went purposefully to the phone. When he was connected, he spoke.

"Like speak Mr. Ames—very great important—Mr. Ames? Cato speak—Mister George—he come, pack some clothes—take away honorable Miss Lindsay with paper to go married—yes, sir, license—Cato think better tell Mr. Ames."

Jimmy's entrance into Lee's private office is best described as a hurdle.

"My Lord, Herb! George and Helen have eloped. Cato saw the license. What 'll we do?"

Lee snatched up his phone.

"Get me Daniel Lindsay, quick!" Connected with Helen's father, he went on: "Hello. Mr. Lindsay? Lee speaking. Helen's eloped with Viscount Harcourt."

A hearty burst of laughter jarred Lee's ears. "God bless my soul!" the father exclaimed. "The little rascal."

"You don't understand, Mr. Lindsay. He's a—a—fake—not a real nobleman at all—we're distracted. What shall we do?"

The copper magnate gathered his forces.

"Come around here at once. Don't talk over the phone."

Jimmy and Lee snatched their hats, and in five minutes were closeted with Lindsay. Quailing under his drawn eyebrows and tight-lipped mouth, they confessed the sorry tale of the bet. Lindsay rose, threw a word to his secretary in the outer office, and, followed by the two young men, was in the elevator and out on the street in a moment.

It was his habit to leave his office shortly after four, so that there was no delay about his car. The chauffeur was waiting with it, a few paces beyond the door.

"Huntington, Conroy, and drive like hell!"

The three men sat in heavy silence as Conroy proceeded to ignore traffic signals. The big purple Rolls was well known to the force, and they encountered no trouble. They were on the Queensboro Bridge before Jimmy ventured a remark.

"Mr. Lindsay, I want to tell you how terribly sorry I am about all this—"

"That's enough, young man! When this mess is cleared up, I'll deal with you."

Jimmy subsided, crestfallen, but his mercurial spirit was never long static. At Long Island City he asked timidly:

"Why on earth are you going away out to Huntington?"

"If I know Helen, she'll go to Carew to be married. It's our one chance."

The purple limousine turned into Jackson Avenue, and began to eat up the road to Flushing. All three men leaned forward, straining ahead to catch a glimpse of the yellow roadster. They shot past car after car, with open throttle and whining tires. After Flushing the road narrowed into the Northern Boulevard, where there was less traffic.

"Good Lord, Conroy, we're crawling!" shouted Lindsay.

"We're making sixty, sir," replied the man.

At the top of a hill, on a long straight stretch, Jimmy suddenly clutched Lindsay's knee.

"Look there, sir! That's Helen's car."

Far ahead, traveling at a smart pace—Helen had a mania for speed—the late sun glinted on the yellow flanks of the roadster. Lindsay leaned forward.

"Catch them, Conroy, for Heaven's sake! It's more than life or death."

"I'm getting every ounce I can out of her, sir. The limousine is built more for comfort than for speed."

"Strain her—ruin her, I don't care. Only catch them!"

Conroy bent to his task, and defeated his master's ends. The roadster was going a—to Helen—leisurely fifty under George's guidance, when Helen happened to glance behind. The steadily gaining Rolls loomed a quarter of a mile away—near enough for Helen to recognize the purple car with the distinctive ornament on the radiator cap.

"George, father's car's right behind us! Step on the gas!"

Excitement, opposition, the whole topsyturvy situation added to George's recklessness. His foot came down on the accelerator, and the car shot forward like a released bird. Helen turned round in her seat, her cheeks aglow with exhilaration.

"This is gorgeous fun!" she cried. "I wonder how father found out? He did, you know. He's driving like the wind, and

he usually goes fifteen an hour. Don't let them catch us, George. I shall hate you if you do."

At the top of the Roslyn hill the big car began to gain on them. A splendid driver, George was afraid to let the roadster coast with the clutch out, but Conroy, relying on the weight of the limousine, hurtled down the winding slope at break-neck speed.

"George, they're gaining! Let her out! Lose them! We'll need at least ten minutes' headway if we're to be completely married before they catch us. Oh, what fun!"

On the level the roadster pulled away again, but the road was a series of up-and-down slopes, and the Rolls was taking advantage of them, to hold her position.

"If we can just keep them in sight!" prayed Lindsay. "They can't get married in thirty seconds, you know."

"Don't worry, sir," ventured Jimmy. "We're bound to be in time."

"Drive straight to the rectory—Carew's," he told Conroy.

The chauffeur, bent grimly over the wheel, nodded.

On rushed the two powerful cars, eating up the ribbon of road, past trees, houses, villages—Helen, in the roadster, joyously laughing, the men in the limousine masks of desperate determination.

Ten minutes outside of Huntington, a crack like a pistol shot cut the air. The Rolls wavered, skidded, righted itself, and Conroy came to a slow stop. He got down, and examined the tires.

"Blow-out, sir. The tires are burning hot."

Lindsay threw up his hands in despair. But he was always the man of action, and he looked about now with the air of a general. They were on a lonely stretch, between fields and wood, but half a mile away a house was visible through the trees.

"Conroy, put on the spare in double quick. Jimmy, run as fast as you can to that house, and phone Carew to do nothing till I arrive. Why in Heaven's name didn't I think of the telephone before!"

Jimmy was speeding down the road before the words were out of his mouth. In the roadster, Helen clapped her hands.

"George, they've stopped. Conroy's kicking at the tire. They've had a puncture. Oh—Jimmy's with them—he's running like mad up the road. Hurry, George,

they're going to phone Dr. Carew. I know."

It was well the yellow roadster was known in Huntington, for it flashed unchallenged through the beautiful old street at seventy.

"That's the house. Slow down, now. We're here."

They drew up before the picturesque vine-covered rectory, and rang the bell. A trim maid showed them into the homely living room, and went to call Dr. Carew. Helen's first act was characteristic. She went swiftly to the phone, and took the receiver off the hook.

"It's a wise child that knows its own father," she chuckled. "We'll leave the phone that way till after the ceremony."

Comfortable rosy old Dr. Carew, and his equally comfortable and rosy wife were delighted to see their pet. When Helen made her wishes clear, they were at once appalled and transported. With verbal misgivings, but inward romantic approval, the little rector got out his prayer book, and called in the trim maid to make a second witness. In five minutes the ceremony was over.

Mrs. Carew kissed the bride, and sent the maid for the old sherry which she kept for the purpose of drinking health to adventurous young spirits. Their mild gaiety was interrupted by a prolonged peal at the bell. In an instant the three disheveled men poured into the room.

"Carew, am I in time?" shouted Lindsay. "Answer me!"

The little rector gasped open mouthed. Helen, with a gay laugh, answered for him.

"Just in time, dad—to congratulate us." She dropped him a little curtsy. "*Voilà*—Viscountess Harcourt."

"You devil!" Lindsay flung at George through gritted teeth. George stood silent, impassive and inscrutable.

"Helen, Helen, you don't know what you've done. This wretch here is an impostor—a bogus count—a bum. He's no more the Viscount Harcourt than I am."

"Father," said Helen sharply, "be careful. You're speaking of my husband."

For answer, Lee thrust the contract, signed by the three young men, under her eyes. As she read it, the color slowly drained from her cheeks.

"George," she whispered at last, "you did this—to me?"

The Bum raised his head, and met her eyes.

"Have you forgotten?" he asked in level, bitter tones. "You said you loved me, for myself, no matter what I was. Talk, was it? I'm nothing without the label."

He gave a short harsh laugh.

"Lord, what a mess!" muttered Lindsay. "I can't even arrest this ruffian, or flog him as he deserves. We've got to save Helen from talk at all costs." He considered the situation frowningly.

"Carew, I rely on you to keep this absolutely to yourself. The best we can do is a quiet annulment. It'll take time, but I think I can manage it. You"—to George—"take yourself out of this in double quick. I suppose I've laid myself open to blackmail for the rest of my life—well—I'll pay in reason, if you keep your mouth shut. How much?"

"Keep your money," said George. "I'll go, and you won't hear from me again. On my honor as a—" He broke off with another hard laugh, turned on his heel, and left the house. As the outer door banged, Helen swayed, with groping hands, and slipped to the floor with a sobbing sigh.

VI

GEORGE reached New York early in the evening. Heartsick, sore, and ashamed of his own part in the melodrama of the past few hours, he longed for companionship, and tramped across town to First Avenue, to the only friends he had among the indifferent six millions of the city.

The Flynns' cordial greeting was balm to him, and he poured out the whole incredible story to them, sparing neither himself nor the others in his bitterness. Nannette, over whose head the subtle ethics of the situation passed unnoticed, was thrilled by the exciting love interest.

"Don't worry, George," she comforted him, quaintly. "All the very best love stories have to have quarrels, and obstacles, and things. But if she loves you—and I know she does—she won't be able to stop, and everything will come right in the end."

"In the last reel?" commented George, with a wry smile. "This isn't the movies, Nannette. It's life, and it's—over."

Flynn shook his wise old head, and sighed.

"It's sorry I am for you, my lad. But you brought it on yourself, and now you'll pay. A pity that innocent girl pays with you. I never thought you'd do such a thing—you, with your clear eyes."

The eyes dropped before old Flynn's. "Eh, well. Least said, soonest mended. You're young and wrong headed, and you've made a bad mistake. Best forget it, and start fresh, my lad, in your own station.

"There's a job ready-made to your hand that you can have for the asking, if you like. Ryan, of the machine factory, was telling me they need a night watchman bad. Go you down, and say John Flynn sent you."

In a week George had slipped into his new routine. His first act, after securing the job as watchman, was to buy a sturdy ready-made suit. He packed up the well-cut blue one he was wearing, and posted it to Jimmy's flat.

All that remained of the old life was the hundred odd dollars of his card winnings, which he dropped into Nannette's blind box, a faded Blue Rose, and the marriage license. A cot was rigged in the big top-floor room for him, and he became a "paying guest" of the Flynn's.

Helen's secret, meanwhile, was well kept. To protect her, Lindsay refrained from telling even John Ames or Marion of Jimmy's imbecile cruelty. Jimmy went about, subdued and dejected, so like a punished watchdog, that Lindsay felt that the boy suffered enough without further raking over the coals.

Besides, he considered that Lee, older, cooler, and more worldly-wise, was far more to blame for their criminal folly, and he told him so in round terms. But his concern was all for Helen, who went about like a pale wraith of her former gay self.

She did not sicken and waste away in authentic mid-Victorian fashion; she went to dinners and dances as usual, but with a fixed mechanical cheerfulness that wrung his heart. They opened their town house in October, and he began to take her to theaters and the opera to distract her mind.

He brought interesting men home to dinner in his effort to keep her amused, and an outsider would have said that she enjoyed these evenings to the full. But Lindsay knew that her smile was automatic, and her attention wandering.

"Damn him!" he would mutter, with moist eyes. "She's a little thoroughbred, but she can't fool me."

One day, in early November, Helen, restless, and unable to fix her attention on

anything definite, decided to go for a long drive. It was one of those rare Indian summer days, the air soft and warm with a hint of coming rain. She phoned to the garage to send around one of the cars.

Ten minutes later she stood on the broad steps, faint with the recurrence of painful memories. She had not specified which car to send, and at the curb stood the yellow Hispano-Suiza.

She had not even seen it since the day of her marriage, and a flood of unhappiness swept over her. But, as her father had said, she was a thoroughbred, and with a shiver she threw off her weakness, and climbed into the roadster. She drove for hours through the lovely Westchester country, fighting down the pain, and trying to bring herself to consider the whole wretched incident closed.

"How can I love him," she asked herself, impatiently, "when he was such a beast—such a cruel, selfish wretch? Where's my pride? And yet—"

Near Scarsdale a few drops of rain began to fall, and Helen stopped to rummage in the back of the car for a rain coat. As she lifted the lid, the sight of George's suit case struck her like a physical blow.

All these weeks it had lain there, forgotten and unclaimed. And suddenly, as warm and merciful as the soft rain about her, the tears began to flow. They washed away the bitterness and rancor; only a pitiful unhappiness remained.

"Oh, George, George, where are you?" she murmured. She opened the suit case, as if seeking obscure comfort from the sight of his familiar clothes.

The first thing that met her eye was a picture post card, sticking out of a pocket of his coat. She picked it up and turned it over. It was a picture of George and a little girl of about twelve, standing together in Central Park—the crude work of the itinerant photographers who make their livelihood on the streets out of nursemaids and proud mothers of tenement babies. There was writing on the reverse side, and Helen read:

DEAR NANNETTE:

Here's the picture the man took of us the other day. I wish you could see it—perhaps some day, soon, you will. At any rate, your G. F. will be glad to have it. Love from George.

It was addressed to "Miss Nannette Flynn, 114 First Avenue." Evidently

George had intended to mail it that day—the day of their marriage. She slipped the card into the pocket of her rain coat, and turned the car toward town, her heart lighter than it had been for weeks.

"At least," she told herself, exultantly, "it's something."

The next morning she telephoned the gardener at Huntington, and inquired for her beloved Blue Roses. Warm pipes ran under the rose arbor, and she was informed that the Blue Roses were still blooming in profusion. She gave some orders, and spent the day in a fever of anticipation.

That evening, she insisted, with something of her old-time gayety, on her father's going to his club. Relieved, and pathetically happy at her change of mood, he went. Five minutes later, Helen, her arms laden with flowers, hailed a taxi, and drove to First Avenue. She found the old house, climbed the rickety stairs, and knocked, her heart in her mouth.

A childish treble bade her enter, and she found herself facing the Nannette of the post card. Suddenly her conduct seemed appallingly brazen to her, and she stammered haltingly:

"Is Mrs.—Smith in?"

Nannette trilled with laughter.

"We haven't a single Smith in the whole house," she said. "There's everything else but—Browns, and Reillys, and Finnigans, and O'Briens. We're Flynns."

"I see; I expect I'm in the wrong house. I was bringing some flowers to Mrs.—er—Smith. But if she isn't here, what can I do? Perhaps you'll let me give them to you?" She thrust the immense bunch of roses into the child's arms, and Nannette buried her nose in them ecstatically, while Helen looked about her with the keenest curiosity.

"Do you live here alone, my dear?" she ventured.

"Oh, no! With my G. F., and George."

Helen's heart skipped a beat.

"George?" she echoed faintly.

"Yes. He's our paying guest, and our very best friend. He's wonderful. I'm so sorry he's not in. His job is night work, so you'll miss him, of course. But G. F. will be back any minute; he's just gone to the store."

Helen declared herself unable to wait, and, kissing the child, left hurriedly. She had no desire for old Flynn to describe her to George—she was ashamed of herself al-

ready for her impulsive forwardness, but, in spite of it, her heart sang as she drove back to Fifth Avenue.

At least, she knew where he lived—he was no longer a blurred, submerged atom, who might be in any part of the universe, for all she knew.

Here he was, quietly living his life, within a mile of her, with a definite address, and a humble job. She told herself she despised him, and intended firmly to forget him, but she was strangely and idiotically happy for the first time since her runaway marriage.

The next morning at seven, when George came in from work, the big room was sweet with the scent of roses.

"Hello!" he sniffed. "You been debuting?" he teased Nannette. She poured out the whole exciting story, and led him to the window to see the roses. The delicate exotic mauve color was unmistakable. George went dead white, and dropped his hand heavily on the child's shoulder.

"Tell me all about it again," he said with difficulty. Nothing loath, she repeated her story in detail. And then, to her bewilderment, George did the most surprising thing; he gave a great hearty burst of laughter and kissed her, saying:

"Who can tell, Nannette? Perhaps the movies know more about life than I thought!"

As Nannette confided to her grandfather later:

"George is a darling, but I sometimes think that sorrow has turned his brain."

The days passed, the Blue Roses drooped, withered, and died. Helen came no more, and George lived on the memory of her one impulsive gesture. He racked his brain to discover how she had found his address; for, with the intuition of a lover, he discarded the flimsy excuse of "Mrs. Smith." But life was far more bearable for that one visit—he felt that she, as well as he, was beating wings to come to him. Well, he could wait.

The wait was not indefinite, and not long. Coming home one morning from his work, with a newspaper still damp from the press, he stopped dead on the street, his eyes riveted to the page. Early laborers passed him, jostling him as he stood, rooted to the spot.

Then he dashed upstairs, swallowed a mouthful of the coffee Nannette had in readiness for him, and spoke hurriedly, ex-

citedly to old Flynn. Flynn dropped his pipe with a "God bless my soul!" Nannette pouted at their secrets, George kissed her with a flourish, and was gone.

VII

IN December the Anglo-American Society, that august and highly exclusive body of aristocrats, gave a reception in honor of the British Ambassador. Sir Henry Robbins, with his secretary, aids, and valet, came on from Washington, and stopped the night at the Ritz, where the reception was to be given.

The immense ballroom, with its mezzanine boxes, was a riot of color, flowers, and flags. The Union Jack crossed the Stars and Stripes over the center box, in which the President and Sir Henry were to sit. Every other box was packed to overflowing by the favored of fortune, for a card to the Anglo-American reception was an open sesame to international society.

John Ames, with Marion, Jimmy, and Lee, leaned over the red velvet railing to chat with Helen and her father in the next box. They gazed down on the milling crowds on the ballroom floor, where white shoulders and jeweled heads contrasted brilliantly with the clean-cut black and white of the men's clothes.

Suddenly, the incessant movement was arrested, the guests stood, as if sharply turned to stone, the occupants of the boxes rose with one accord, and the band burst into "God Save the King"—or "My Country, 'Tis of Thee," according to which side of the Atlantic you were born on.

The President appeared in the center box, bowed, smiled, and stood aside to make way for Sir Henry, a distinguished, white-haired Englishman, followed by a couple of younger men. He, too, bowed and smiled, as the spontaneous applause of the crowd rose.

In the Ames box, Jimmy suddenly gave a gasp, and dug his fingers into Lee's arm.

"Look!" he whispered. Lee followed his eyes, and he, too, gasped. Behind Sir Henry a young man with smooth tawny hair and faultless evening clothes, stood respectfully smiling, and listening to the President.

"It can't be!" whispered Lee.

"I'll stake my last cent it is!" returned Jimmy in suppressed excitement. "My Lord, what a nerve he's got—and how well he looks!"

They glanced at Helen, in the next box, but she was serenely at ease. Evidently she had not seen him—yet. Lee cursed under his breath, but Jimmy's mouth widened to a grin of impish delight.

"I've got to hand it to him, Herb," he chuckled. "And do you know, I like the chap—rogue or not. He's got guts. Imagine putting it over on the British Ambassador, and the President! And it looks like he's chewing all he bit off."

"It's a most damnable outrage, and I'm going to expose him!"

"Oh, keep out of it, Herb. You'll make a fearful scandal."

"It's my duty!" Lee rose, and, with a word to Mr. Ames, left the box. At the door of the box of honor, Lee found his way barred by a polite but firm young under secretary.

"Will you please tell Sir Henry that I must see him at once on a matter of vital importance?"

The polite young man bowed, and entered the box. In a moment he was back, beckoned to Lee, and again took up his post in the corridor outside.

Lee found himself in the back of the box, shut off from the occupants by heavy velvet hangings. But the curtains parted, and Sir Henry, suave and courteous, stood before him, with mild inquiry in his eyes.

"Sir Henry," began Lee hurriedly, "a scandalous imposition—a disgraceful hoax is being perpetrated upon you. That—that man in the box with you—he probably calls himself Viscount Harcourt—"

"No," corrected Sir Henry quietly, "the Earl of Harcourt."

"Whatever it is, it's false. He's an impostor—a crook. I felt it my duty to warn you—"

Sir Henry regarded him with a twinkle of amusement.

"Which are you?" he inquired mildly. "The young gentleman who bet, or the one who—ah—launched George?"

Lee began to stammer incoherently.

"Is that the matter of vital importance about which you had to see me?" asked Sir Henry.

"I—yes, sir; it is. I felt it my duty to warn you that the man was a loafer, a bum, when I picked him out of the gutter."

"For your own purposes, was it not?" A thin film of ice coated Sir Henry's geniality. "Still, I feel some sort of explanation is due you. The man in question

happens to be my nephew, and the Earl of Harcourt since November, when his father passed away.

"Some years ago, a very regrettable quarrel occurred between George and the old earl, who, I may say, was of a somewhat arbitrary temperament. He accused his son of a rather shameful bit of rascality, and young George, who also had his share of pride and hot-headedness, left Harcourt, swearing never to enter its door again until it was his. Deplorable, regrettable, but there it is.

"He was hardly brought up to earn his living, with the result that he was pretty close to starvation and despair when you first ran across him. That is all, I believe, except that he assured me he never would have married Miss—ah—Lindsay, except for the fact that he knew he could make good his pretensions at any time.

"He has told me the whole story in detail, and, of course, deliberately chose his own name in which to masquerade. He has been away from America until this morning, and he has spent the entire day at the bedside of a young person named Flynn, I believe, who has just undergone an operation on the eyes, at George's instigation and expense.

"That, I think, covers the situation, and you will oblige me greatly if you will con-

duct the earl and me to his wife, if she is here."

He parted the curtains, and called to George, who joined him at once. Lee, thunderstruck, crestfallen, and speechless, found himself face to face with a young man, who looked completely indifferent to him.

"My dear viscount—earl—" began Lee.

"Coming, uncle," said George.

At the door, he spoke calmly to the young attaché.

"I think you'll find a person in the box who needs smelling salts," he said gravely; and arm in arm with Sir Henry, approached the Lindsay box.

As Jimmy expressed it, the rest was like the last five minutes of a play; loose ends were tied up, old Lindsay all but embraced both Sir Henry and the young earl. But Helen's flush of happiness, her starry-eyed look of bliss, were too real to be of the theater. As the two men entered the box, she turned, and started to her feet with a glad cry.

"George!"

Sir Henry tactfully pushed her through the curtains with George, and himself stood guard over their heavy folds. If he heard strange and suspicious noises behind them, he never batted one of his distinguished eyelashes.

THE END

IMAGINATION

WHEN out of the void came form
And land rose from the deep—
When wings of the first mad storm
Brushed eyes of an ancient sleep—
When life sprang from the dead—
When the first dawn shimmered fair,
In vesture of purple and red
And glowing, I was there.

Where I am, there breathes life;
Where I am not, lies dust
And Greece and Rome in strife
Are prey to the moth and rust:
Wherever the mystic grail
Shines far on the skyline fair,
And a soul bows not to Baal,
Take heart, for I am there.

Wherever the seed of love
Flowers forth in fragrance rare,
Look to the blue above,
For deathless, I am there.

Olin Lyman

